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EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE.

VOL. III.



EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE

THREE VOLUMES.—III.



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I.

DAN THE DREDGER.

HOWEVER correct Mr Jones's opinion may have been of a good many of the people who availed themselves of Matthey's kindness, it was certainly wrong in reference to Matthey's landlord, Dredger Dan. Dan was in want of help sometimes, and then did not disdain to accept it from his good-natured lodger; but Dan was an independent little fellow in his way, and made a point of paying back any help he got as soon and as fully as he could. A

very worthy little man was Dan, hard-working, temperate, honest except in a point or two in which his moral sense had been warped by the traditions of his calling; God-fearing and God-loving, too, in a genuine, although not always a very enlightened, manner. A short, brown, shrivelled, silent little man, in antique, many-patched garments, making little fuss about his duty to his neighbour, but trying hard to do it, according to his lights, as well as earn a living for himself; that is the best general description I can give of Dan. His employment was of a kind that might have been supposed full of startling incidents, and in the course of my talks with him I found that he *had* had adventures, but I was obliged to pull the incidents out of him, one after another, by main force, as it were. A long life of which the greater part had been spent in

solitary toil—by night as well as day—a kind of toil which encouraged reticence, and in meditations on weather, tides, eddies, dead water, and holes and chinks in the river's bottom, had not qualified Dan to shine in conversation.

Of course, it was Matthey who introduced me to his landlord. Matthey had a very neat, snug little room in Dan's *not* very neat, snug little house. Dan's old wife had a small brood of orphan grandchildren to look after—the children of their eldest son. All *their* children were dead, and they had no one else to help them in looking after these youngsters. Nobody, but Matthey, that is, who would often lend the old woman a sailor's handy hand, when he happened to be at home—would help her in cooking, washing, carpentering, clothes-mending, nursing. Matthey could manage the children far better than poor

old Mrs Dan. She tried to do her duty by them, but she was *too* old to have the charge of a swarm of noisy children. Almost the only luxury in which she indulged was a short afternoon nap, and even this she could not enjoy unmolested. The poor old body never had a smile or a kind word for the children, and attended to their wants in a feebly-hustling, querulous fashion that won her neither love nor respect. They gave both willingly enough to cheery Matthey, who told them such capital stories, kept them in sweeties, did all kinds of things for them, and yet maintained discipline too. To be allowed to cluster in his little room, and hear his tales, was their greatest treat. Matthey would sometimes collect them there, when he would very well have liked to have his room to himself, simply that the poor old grandmother might get a little peace. At other times he

would invite the old woman up to have a good cup of tea with him in cleanliness and quiet.

The old woman liked the neatness and tranquillity of Matthey's room, and yet she would make them a ground of grumbling against her lodger-host. 'Ah, Matthey,' she would say, 'it's easy to see that you ain't a married man—you carries your family under your hat. Or if you *are* a father, you've desarted your own flesh and blood, and I don't like to think *you'd* be so unnateral. Look at me. There's you, a great strong man, without chick or child to plague ye, and a poor old woman like me must have the life worried out of her by all them kids. And they ain't my flesh and blood neither—not regular—if you come to that. Their father was my son, poor boy, a deal finer chap than any o' them will ever be. But, I never said his

wife was my daughter. I never give my consent to it. We'd words about it, me and my young Dan had. And there, as if that worn't enough—to take my boy from me—that poor stuck-up, washed-out wife of his must go and have no end of children jest as if she was as strong as a horse. And then when poor Dan died, she must go and die too, to git rid of the trouble of 'em, and leave 'em all for me and my old man to look after. God knows we've often had trouble enough to keep ourselves, and now when we're gittin' old and things is at the hardest, we must have that stuck-up thing's brats poked on us. If they weren't Dan's too, they should walk pretty quick. But I ain't like some folks—I can't deny my own flesh and blood, and spend all on myself. Jest see how nice you've got things about you, Matthey, and then look at the muddle my place is al'ays in.'

In spite of the assistance which good-natured Matthey gave her now and then, Mrs Dan's part of the house certainly did present a very striking contrast to her lodger's. He had been in the navy as well as the merchant service, and so, in addition to the handiness which almost all sailors have, he had the smart, brisk, cleanly tidiness which is generally the distinguishing characteristic of the man-of-war's man. Add to his sailor's handiness and neatness his natural love of beauty, and it may be supposed that he had made a very cosy cabin for himself. He had caulked the deck, as he phrased it—*i. e.* filled up the cracks and gaping seams in and between the floor-planks and the holes where 'knots' had tumbled out—and kept his deck so assiduously 'holystoned' that the once black, uneven, pitted, and wrinkled boards were almost as smooth as a plate,

and if they had not been brought back to whiteness, at any rate they were lighter than the yellow soap which had assisted the holystone in their purification. Rows of milk-white lockers of Matthey's own construction ran round the walls, which Matthey, again, had papered with a pretty pattern, and dotted with prints that had taken his fancy, and for which he had made the frames. His little window-seat was full of pretty flowers. From his well-whitened ceiling hung a cage tenanted by a merrily carolling mule between the goldfinch and canary. At night-time a hammock hung from it also, tenanted by the peacefully snoring Matthey ; but by day it was deposited, neatly packed and corded, in 'hammock-nettings' of home manufacture fastened just below the window-seat. Over the mantel-shelf was Matthey's shaving-glass framed in triple rows of small

white cowries. (Shaving has so gone out now amongst all classes of Englishmen, both landsmen and seamen—though, by-the-by, my friend was not an Englishman by blood—that I may mention the fact of my having seen Matthey shave before that little glass, and the way in which he used to do it. Old habit still told on him. He straddled his legs and swayed backwards and forwards, raised his razor with slow, and made it do its mowing with swift, caution, as if he were still anxious to preserve his centre of gravity, and save his chin and cheeks, and possibly his nose, from gashes, on board a pitching or rolling vessel.) On his mantel-shelf stood a stuffed green, red, and purple king parrot, a polished tortoise-shell, and sundry sea-shells, pink and white, leopard-spotted, cloud-mottled, prismatically pearly, curiously whorled, fantastically spined and knobbed univalves

and bivalves. On little green-corded bookshelves of home make, though the wood was Bermudian cedar, Matthey's little library was arranged: a Bible, a two-volume Encyclopædia in boards, a Bailey's Dictionary in gravy-coloured binding, a few odd volumes of Natural History, and one or two old-fashioned poetry-books.

In Matthey's snug little cabin one evening I found his landlord smoking with him. ‘This is Dan, sir,’ said Matthey. The dredger got up, took his pipe out of his mouth, gave a nod, put his pipe into his mouth again, uncomfortably in the centre of his pursed lips, whence it hung like the trunk of an elephant, said never a word, gave no pull at his pipe, and so stood staring, with his hands in his pockets, until Matthey made him take his seat again, and bade him smoke in a more ‘Christian-like’—*i.e.* corner-of-the-mouth

—fashion. Matthey tried hard to drag the dredger into the conversation that followed. The old man was evidently gratified by the attention, but at first responded merely by a pull at his pipe, a nod, and then a puff from his pipe. The nod having to express negation, qualification, and all kinds of things, besides affirmation, and Dan's set face, even when upraised to pull at his pipe, affording no context to judge from, this mode of conveying thought became bewildering; but at last Dan advanced to a pull, a nod, a puff, and a monosyllable. Eventually he advanced to a pull, a nod, a puff, and two, three, four, five, even half a dozen words together. We became very good friends, and often foregathered afterwards, but very little beyond the six-word limit of consecutive utterance could I ever get him. I should add, however, that, as our intimacy ripened, the pull, the nod,

and the puff, although very nearly as frequent as formerly, no longer merely finished off utterances which were concisely complete, but curiously broke into asthmatic fragments more lengthy deliveries. A man's biography, I think, is almost always best given in his own words. Every student of character can form his own opinion then, and is not obliged to adopt another observer's cut and dried estimate, without materials affording a chance of rectifying, curtailing, expanding, or possibly even point-blank contradicting it. From every biography in which the subject is not allowed to speak largely of and for himself, one learns far more of the mental and moral make of the biographer than of the biographee. Where that plan, however, is adopted, you get to know at first hand what the man fancied himself, at any rate, or wished others to

fancy him. You become intimate with him—very speedily get ‘up’ to his tricks of manner. You can form your own judgment as to whether he is telling more or less than the truth, or the flat opposite of it, unjustly denouncing himself, absurdly extolling himself, or fishingly depreciating himself with the vanity, rather than the pride which apes humility.

Omitting, therefore,—except where they would not obviously suggest themselves,—the questions by which I elicited my information, I will compress into a single narrative, in Dan’s own manner, an outline of what I learned in many interviews, of the dredger’s history. My triplicated full-stop is intended to represent the pull, nod, and puff with which Dan commenced and punctuated his discourse.

‘ . . . Born . . . And bred . . . Father before me . . . His father before him . . .

Rare games . . . Old times . . . No docks . . . Ships a-layin' in the river . . . Smugglin' . . . Smugglin' now . . . Cigars . . . 'Baccy . . . Furrin' steamers . . . Nothin' to speak on though . . . Old times was the smugglin' times . . . *Wrong?* . . . Don't know . . . Never heard it . . . Wouldn't do wrong . . . No, not for no money . . . Cribbin' coals *is* wrong . . . *That's* wrong, if you like . . . Out o' lighters . . . At night . . . Nobody aboard . . . Some dredgers doos it . . . *That's* stealin' . . . *That*, I'll own . . . Yes, we dredges for coal . . . When they's at the bottom . . . *That's* different . . . Anybody can see *that* . . . Barge is sunk . . . It's a Godsend . . . Swarm to it . . . News spreads . . . 'Bove bridge men comes down . . . Woolwich men comes . . . Bark-ing . . . All parts . . . Work night and day . . . 'Taint much we gets . . . After all . . .

'Specially in summer . . . Folks don't care for fires . . . So much . . . Then . . . Six-pence a bushel . . . Say . . . Winter's better . . . Coals is dearer . . . Weather's wuss . . . More barges capsizes . . . Shillin' a bushel then . . . And we've arned it . . . Look how we fag . . . Old times was the times . . . Yes, if you did honest . . . Smugglin' and findin's together . . . You're the fust that ever told me smugglin' worn't honest . . . Matthey's a goodish chap . . . I don't doubt . . . I never axed him . . . Don't expect he'd say so . . . He's been a seafarin' man . . . Understands all about sich things . . . '

'Well, putting together all their earnings, what do you think the dredgers in old times used to get?'

' . . . As much . . . In a day . . . And less than that . . . Orfen . . . As *we* gets . . . In a month . . . It's starvation . . . Nowa-

days . . . No, I don't grumble . . . Bones is scarce . . . Metal's scarce . . . Everything's scarce . . . River's fair empty . . . Nowadays . . . But God's good . . . He lets folks . . . Drownd themselves . . . *In* the summer . . . A copse is a real . . . Godsend then . . . There's the reward . . . And the . . . Inquest money . . .'

'Have you found many corpses?'

' . . . In my . . . Time, sir . . . A few . . . Last was a poor gal's . . . Shouldn't say . . . She'd ever been pretty . . . Jumped off London Bridge . . . Inquest at Dock Head . . . Nobody owned her . . . 'Tworn't likely . . . Got my inquest money . . . No reward . . . Worn't worth it . . . Who cared for her? . . . Yes, God might . . . *He's* good . . . Them *He's* made . . . Ain't much like Him . . . Most on 'em . . .'

'Do, do—did you ever hear of a case,

I mean—do, do, do, dredgers ever rifle the corpses they find?’

‘ . . . Rob, you mean . . . I s’pose . . . You can’t rob the dead . . . No, I never heared of a case . . . Don’t we bring ’em ashore . . . With their purses . . . And watches . . . And all that? . . . Ketch me takin’ . . . Anything . . . From a copse . . . His friends would know him by . . . Ain’t it likely their purses is empty . . . Before they’d jump overboard? . . . And if they isn’t . . . Who’s to say . . . What’s become of the tin? . . . *Robbery!*

. . . You can’t rob a copse . . . You’ve fished up . . . Out of the mud . . . I ain’t a robber . . . I can say my commandments . . . Thou shalt not steal . . . I say my prayers . . . And I do my duty . . . ’s far as I can . . . Ain’t it God’s orders? . . . Am I a-goin’ to run agin

Him? . . . He's good . . . I know . . .
Whoever ain't? . . . Yes, and I know about
Jesus Christ . . . Worn't *he* a poor man's
friend? . . . If I'd been a robber . . .
I shouldn't ha' slaved . . . All my life . . .
As I've done . . . To arn a honest crust
. . . For them as belongs to me . . . 's
well as myself . . . Out at two . . . *In* the
mornin' . . . I am . . . Orfen . . .
Lonely? . . . Might be to you . . . I've
my work to do . . . I'm up to plazes
. . . Some ain't? . . . There ain't many
older than me . . . On the river now . . .
One mornin' . . . I fished up . . . A ring
. . . And a 'alf-crown . . . And a silver
teaspoon . . . All in one mornin' . . .
Ring worn't much 'count . . . But if I'd
been a lay-a-bed . . . I shouldn't ha' got
'em? . . . 'Taint once in ten years now . . .
I get such luck? . . . God was wery good
. . . He's for ever doin' somethin' . . .

Himself . . . And so I s'pose . . . He likes to help them . . . As is willin' . . . To help themselves . . . Yes, I do pray to Him . . . When I'm out . . . In the dark . . . For luck . . . 'Taint for that only . . . I like to feel right with Him . . . 'specially . . . When I've a copse . . . In tow . . . They pull queer somehow . . . At the line . . . Yes, you can see the lights . . . Ashore . . . And the ships' lights . . . When 'tain't too foggy . . . But I'll own . . . I do feel a bit lonely . . . As you call it . . . Then . . . No, I ain't used to it yet . . . Copses is common . . . But 'tain't one man, you see . . . Gets all the copses . . . No sich luck . . . Still 'tis good o' God . . . To diwide 'em . . . Among us . . . As He doos . . . And send one . . . Sometimes . . . To ye . . . Jest when you hain't a bit o' bread . . . In the house . . . God's good . . . All round . . . If folks 'ud only . . . See it . . .

He won't let a chap drownd hisself . . . Or
get drownded . . . Without makin' him . . .
Do good to somebody . . . If you're only
lucky enough . . . To fish the copse up . . .
Yes, pretty nigh all my life . . . I've been
a-dredgin' . . . On the London river . . .
When I was a bit of a boy . . . Mother's
brother took me . . . Hysterin' and that
. . . He was a Bricklesea man . . . Bric-
klesea, you know, sir . . . Mouth o' Colches-
ter river . . . But I came back, and went
out with father . . . And when he died . . .
I had his boat . . . Till I could buy a new
un . . . 'Tain't many new uns I've had . . .
Since . . . But what I've got . . . I expect
. . . Will last me out . . . And then they
can do what they like with her . . . She'll
be as tired o' dredgin' most like . . . As
I am . . . My old gal will be gone . . .
Most like . . . Before me . . . There's the
kids, but they must shift for themselves . . .

Some on 'em would have to do it now . . .
If their father was alive . . . Me and my
old gal . . . Has done our best by 'em . . .
And when we can't do no more . . . We
must leave 'em to God to look after . . .
He's good . . . And He's willin' enough
. . . Don't He say so? I goes to church
. . . When I can spare time . . . Matthey
don't . . . Though he's more time than me
. . . But Matthey's al'ays willin' . . . To
read me a chapter . . . When I wants it . . .
Matthey's a better scholar than me . . .
Though he hain't so much notion . . . Of
religion . . . But take him through . . .
Matthey ain't such a bad sort . . . And
God's good . . . To the wust o' men . . .
I orfen tells Matthey that . . . To hearten
him up . . . To do what's proper.'

II.

A BROOD OF MUDLARKS.

A FACTORY, the newspapers say, has been started for the extraction of grease out of Thames mud—grease to be exported to Holland, and thence brought back as Dutch butter. Whether any poor Londoners do really get their butter from the river's slimy bed I cannot state, but there is a little army of poor Londoners who pick their bread out of those steaming mudbanks. As the tide goes down bent old men and women, and little old-faced

boys and girls, drop from the stairs, on which they have been waiting, and scatter themselves over the slime, to wade and pry, and pounce like swamp-birds.

In one of my river-side districts I had opened a little school in a lane leading down to the water, and into it I tried to entice the little mudlarks of the neighbourhood. It was not, however, until I opened it as a night-school that I succeeded in numbering any of them amongst my, till then, scanty flock of pupils. They and other river-side children came readily enough then, but, as a rule, it was not to learn, the teacher told me. They liked the warmth of the room, the company they found there, and the chance it afforded them of fun in the shape of chaffing one another, and mutinously shouting down the teacher's orders. However, we managed to maintain at length some faint approxima-

tion to discipline, although to the last a scholastic martinet would have been horrified had he witnessed the free and easy ways, and the audacious pranks, we were obliged to put up with, through a fear that if we pulled even our silken reins at all tight, there would first be a general insurrection, and then a general exodus. But, as I have said, we did at last get what to us, at any rate, after our previous experiences, looked a little like order ; a few of the children took an interest in their week-night lessons ; and most of them were willing to come to the school by daylight on Sundays. All the mudlarks, I think, came. They told me that they did not work on Sundays, but they could give no reason why. When I first started the school I thought that the mudlarks' unwillingness to come by day in the week was simply caused by love of lazy liberty. Most children have a queer fond-

ness for dabbling in the dirt. When you take your walks abroad in far more aristocratic regions than the East End you may often see a daintily dressed little toddler slyly eluding her nursemaid's vigilance, and then hear her chuckling delight because she has been able to plunge her foot into a puddle and splash her whilom snowy socks and plump little mottled bare legs. It was some such love of dirt and mischief as this, I had thought, that made the young mudlarks take to the mud. I had no idea how *necessary* it was for them to grub about in the filthy stuff—how cold, and generally wretched, they often felt in it.

The first real insight I got into the miseries of young mudlarks' life I obtained from a quaint trio of them, whom I took illegal possession of as they were trotting past the school door one day when

I had come down, and, as usual, found the teacher in almost solitary possession of the room. Two brothers and their little sister made up the number of my captives. They were all very ragged and dirty ; they were all very lean, but there was just a hint of childhood's pretty chubbiness in the curly-headed little girl's face. A queer little 'Daughter of the Regiment' she looked, trudging along with an old fig-drum slung from her shoulder to put her findings in. Her elder brother had an old nosebag for his receptacle, the younger an old saucepan. The little girl seemed to be about five years old ; her brothers about eight and seven. When I took hold of the little girl's hand, she raised a piercing scream, and her brothers, who were a little way a-head, instantly dashed back to the rescue. Up to their breasts went their little clenched right fists, backwards and forwards worked

their little clenched left fists ; ‘ Kick his shins, Sally,’ ‘ Bite his thumb, Sally,’ they shouted. They danced around me with menacing gestures, and looks and words of contemptuous defiance, and then putting down their heads, rushed in, and assaulted me in the most vigorous manner : little Sally meanwhile kicking like a little donkey, and biting and scratching like a cat. By a change of front, however, I contrived to cut off the enemy from the river, and then, extending my flanks, succeeded in sweeping them before me into the school-room ; where, after a time, I succeeded also in making them believe that my intentions were better than they looked. No doubt Jack, the chief speaker, put a somewhat exaggerated value on the earnings they might have made had I not kept them from their work, but after all the indemnification which I had to pay in advance to

my young friends—Jack standing out for that before he would give me, or allow his brother or sister to give me, any information—was no great tax even upon my scantily furnished purse. They were in the habit of selling half a quarter of a hundred-weight of coal, picked up a piece at a time, for a penny, and, therefore, a shilling to be divided amongst them for doing nothing but talk seemed a wonderful bargain to them. I found that they had no father or mother—‘Not as we knows on.’ Jack remembered his father, fancied that he must have been a sailor, and that he gave money for their keep to the old woman with whom he left them when he went to sea. Neither of the other children had any recollection of their parents, and Jack could not remember his mother. ‘We lives with the old cat still,’ Jack went on, ‘pays her for our lodgin’,

and grubs ourselves.' 'She's a old witch,' brother Bill interjected — 'cross as two sticks. She whops Sally when we ain't by. She's afeared to when we is, 'cos we butts her till she's fit to bust—don't she blow, Jack ?'

' But why do you live with her if she isn't kind to you ?'

' I didn't say nuffink about her not being kind,' answered Jack. ' She ain't game to whop me and Bill, and when she pitches into Sally, we sarves her out somehow. May as well live there as anywhere else, s'far as I sees. When we can't pay our lodgin', she turns us out, and we sleeps jest where we can. But we goes back when we've got the browns. Bill and me could manage, but it's cold for little Sally—dossin' out is, though we puts her in the middle, and cuddles up.'

I asked him in what kind of places

they slept when deprived of their regular lodgings.

‘Sometimes aboard the hempty coal-barges, and under a boat if it’s ‘andy. There’s the pipes, too, when the roads is up—they ain’t bad if you git one so as the wind can’t cut through it. There was a old chap once when the roads was up give us a warm by his fire, and a sack to kiver us up. Down by the Sun too ain’t a bad place—where they throw the hashes. And there’s the little harches behind ’Alfmoon Stairs—they’d be unkimmon snug if they wasn’t quite so mucky—an’ there’s rats there, an’ Sally don’t like rats. All kind o’ places we could doss in, if it worn’t for little Sally.’

This, however, was said in no tone of reproach. The two brothers were plainly as fond as boys could be of their little sister—the way in which she wedged her-

self between them during our interview showed how accustomed she was to their affectionate protection. I afterwards saw the regular lodgings of this little self-supporting family. They consisted of what was really merely a triangular cupboard without a door—a space boarded off from a filthy landing at the top of a filthy, crooked staircase. A mat and a singed ironing-blanket, full of holes and dropping to pieces, were literally all the furniture. The ‘old witch’ anxiously informed me that she charged them nothing for this kennel, and gave them the free run of her kitchen, only taking a penny or two from them for the use of her fire when coals were *very* dear; but the different story I had heard from the children appeared the more probable. The landlady did not look like one given to perform actions in any degree disinterested, and when she found

that her professions of kindness did not meet with pecuniary acknowledgment, she changed her tone, and abused both the children and the person who was inquiring about them with most vigorous virulence.

I am happy to say that I rescued the children from the ‘old witch’s’ clutches. It would have been absurd to expect a poor woman like her to give the children even such lodging as she did give them for nothing. What were they to her? Only the orphans of a dead sailor who at one time paid her pretty liberally for their keep. But the woman had charged the children most exorbitantly. I will not mention the sum, because few people whose income is counted in pounds—even a very modest amount of pounds—can realize the crushingly important proportion which an expenditure of a few pence weekly bears to a weekly income of only

a few pence more. The poorest of the poor are often most kindly helped by those who are a mere shade less poor, but they are also sometimes preyed upon by their next ‘superiors,’ as the smallest fish are gobbled by those a trifle larger.

In these papers I want to describe ‘the poor’ as they *are*. A poor person is not necessarily a posy of the choicest flowers of virtue, to be used as a striking contrast to a bundle of rank weeds of rich man’s vice. Amongst poor people as well as rich, just as there are many very kind folks, so there are some most awful ‘screws’ —and the ‘old witch’ was one of the poor screwers of the poor. Of course, I did not trust merely to the children’s account in arriving at this conclusion. I made inquiries in various quarters.

‘I pity the poor little things, I’m sure, sir,’ said one woman to me, ‘but pity’s

about all I've got to spare 'em 'cept now and then a bit o' bread and drippin'—I've got so many o' my own. It's hard lines with the pore little things. I knows the ways o' their life, 'cos I was the same when I was a little un, and the wonder is I've growed up a honest woman. Most of the gals goes to the bad when they're children still, pore dears. It's sich a hard life, you see, sir, that they're glad to do anythink to git out of it, and nobody's told 'em it's wrong to act wrong like that. And the boys horfen grows up thieves. They're used to findin', you see, and so they gits into the 'abit o' findin' what ain't lost. Copper nails is about what pays 'em best to find, and they can't git a farden a pound more for dry rope than they can for wet, and so they prowls about the ship-yards, but they precious soon gits 'unted off. They'll prig coals too out o' the lighters,

when they gits a chance ; and when they're ashore, they're 'angin' about the streets, tryin' to pick up a penny any'ow. It's a bad life for a child. It's down by Greenwich I used to go out. The swells sometimes would pitch us coppers out o' the inn winders and laugh to see us duckin' our 'eads and our 'ands, an' tumblin' one another over in the slush, scramblin' arter them. There worn't much kindness in that, as I can see. It's easy to give money for your fun, and what's a handful o' pennies to a swell ? If they'd remember that them they sets scramblin' was made by the same God as made them, and give 'em a chance to larn to be'ave accordin'—*that* 'ud be kinder, to my way o' thinkin'. Not that the swells is so well-be'aved. Some o' those Greenwich fellers 'ud come to the winders with faces as red as biled lobsters, and shout and go on so as they'd ha' been took up

if they'd been common people. It were a wonder they didn't flop over into the mud themselves. For my part I can't see much difference between folks, swells or common folk, when they've got a drop too much drink in them. They goes on in the same silly way. And if eddication's good for anythink, that's what oughtn't not to be.'

I brought back the good woman to the little people I was inquiring about.

'Pore little dears! The boys is uncommon good to their little sister. 'Ow they'll stand up for her, and give her the best of everythink! And she's a nice little gal, though she do cry so when she've got the chilblains. I've seed her pore little toes swollen up like little taturs. It's cold work gropin' about in the mud barefoot, when it's 'alf-friz. Them pore little things goes and stands in the 'ot water runnin' down from Mr Grainger's works, to warm

their legs up a bit. I should say there's things in it, though, that isn't very good for chilblains.'

Brother Jack and brother Bill are now black-bearded A. B.'s—both of them in the Naval Reserve. The uncles, one of them home from Bombay, and the other from Callao, stood sponsors for their sister's first-born son. 'Little Sally' has grown up into a good, shrewd little woman, and is married to an honest giant, who has regular work in a timber-yard—a most affectionate and obedient husband. She manages all his affairs for him, and he regards her as quite a superior being; but her brothers still extend most patronizing protection to little Sally when they are ashore, quite unconscious of the fact that it is *she* now who saves *them* from being put upon.

III.

MORE ABOUT THE ORPHAN FLOWER-SELLERS.

HOP-GATHERING in a picture is a most 'idyllic' occupation. The hop-garden itself is so beautiful, that an artist who does not make it look so on his canvas must be a wilful traducer of natural beauty. The whilom stiff brown poles no longer look like ranks of giants' broomsticks. Their identity is lost in the gracefully irregular cones of glossy leaves and tassels of light-golden blossom that twine and droop around them. If you think of the prop at

all, it is to fancy, as the lazy sunny autumn breeze stirs the vine-like leaves of the bine, that the nearly smothered pole is, nevertheless, complacently murmuring—

‘ All my misfortunes are but as the stuff
Whence fancy makes me dreams of happiness ;
For *hops* grow round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits and foliage, not my own, seem mine.’

The adroitest artist can only hint the deliciously bracing coolness of the autumn morning air, when the obliquely-shooting sunbeams begin to drink up the dew that trembles, like drops of etherealized quicksilver, on the leaves and blossoms of the bines ; or the lulling aroma that broods in a hop-garden, when its rows and bins are basking in early-afternoon sunshine. But he can make the ripe red wall, and white split extinguishers of warped weather-board on the roof of the old ‘oast-house’ in the background, almost as real as reality, and

more eye-pleasing ; and—so marvellous is the beauty-discovering faculty of Art—he can group the very rags of the hop-pickers into combinations on which the eye delights to linger. Most of the pickers, when the ‘tally’ pleases them, *are* merry-faced at hopping-time, and therefore the artist is only faithful in giving them merry faces. But how he *idealizes* those merry faces !—keeps the fun in them, the features often, too, without giving a hint of the too frequently filthy jest that has caused the merriment. No doubt, he is right in doing so. He has to paint a picture that will please, and even vice takes no delight in its own portrait limned without softening. More or less unconsciously, also, he may have a moral purpose in his aesthetics—though few of those who, directly, most need its teaching, may ever see his doubly-coloured sermon. Art worships Beauty ; and, *au fond*,

the beauties of the body, mind, and heart are intertwined like the three Graces. The artist paints the hop-garden innocent, because he feels, perhaps, rather than thinks, that the hop-garden would be more beautiful, in every sense, if it *were* innocent.

But, when taking a rare holiday, I have helped to strip off the yellow blossoms of the hop into the canvas bins—respectfully admonished by the professional workers, whose ‘tally’ I was doing my best to swell as an amateur, on account of the number of leaves with which I was unwittingly vitiating it; and I have heard the talk that was going on, close at hand, over bins unaided by my amateur labours, and unawed by my professional presence—possibly stimulated into ranker impropriety thereby. I have seen the appreciative grins with which my comrades in the long

double row of pickers greeted those sallies —looking very much like bubblingly-oozing bottles of stout, just at the point of bursting, in the hot sunshine, from the painful efforts which their interested sense of propriety made them make to abstain from acknowledging the same with an uproarious guffaw. I have also seen something, and have heard more from others, of the scenes that take place in and about the thronged ‘hopper-houses ;’ and, therefore, hopping does not seem very ‘idyllic’ (in the modern sense) to me. The idyll is of the ancient type—hoppers talk and act like Theocritus’s peasants.

Nevertheless, I cannot help rejoicing when hopping-time comes round. The poorest poor of East End and South London slums then get their one real holiday, and, whilst they take it, gain not only health, but unwonted wages also. Their

lodging, rough as it generally is, is probably not worse, either physically or morally, than what the bulk of them have been accustomed to ‘at home.’ If they did not go into the country, they could not escape, poor creatures, from defiling sights and sounds ; and, in the country, there is just a chance that Nature’s teaching may tell upon them in some slight degree. At any rate, for a week or two, they have work that they can enjoy, and fresh air to do it in. That does not seem much to say, but it means a good deal when said in reference to those whose lot in life has been cast in the midst of the dreary drudgery and squalid misery of the stifling streets, lanes, alleys, and courts of East and South London. Down the London pickers swarm to join the local pickers, whom they terrify often—especially the Irish amongst the strangers—and, generally speaking, I am

afraid, do *not* often edify. Some already engaged, and some on spec.; some by the South-Eastern's hopper-trains, and some by boat to Gravesend, and so, on foot, across country, to hop-begirt old Maidstone; some tramping down the whole dusty, weary way; some jolting down in fearfully overladen costermongers' carts and barrows. The provisionally hired are sometimes met upon their way by hop-growers' waggons; the others get to their quarters as best they can. And even this humble army is followed by a little swarm of lazy vultures, who have no thought of working, but mean to pick up anything that may come handy in the excitement of hop-harvest—even though taken from the scanty furniture of a hopper-house carelessly left unpadlocked.

Queer barracks most of these hopper-houses are—long, low, red-brick lines of

hovels, bedded with straw, in each of which a dozen and more of men, women, and children ‘house’ like pigs. Anyhow, the night air of the line of walled and latticed-off compartments must almost necessarily be foul, but their miscellaneous tenants make it fouler by blocking up, to the best of their ability, the means of ventilation provided. The poor creatures are accustomed to foul air at night: a good many of them, no doubt, have often felt cold air blowing over them at night: but *that* experience is clustered around with so many dreary associations, that, when they can get the chance, they like to be warm at night, at any cost. Some hop-growers house their pickers in tents, some in extemporized structures of straw-thatched hurdle, some in the out-buildings of their farmsteads—the last *not always* taking proper care that the cattle-sheds are decently

cleansed before their human cattle are turned into them. Common cooking-places are erected outside the barracks of all sorts. The farmers supply their casual labourers with fuel; common gathering-fires are lighted, *al fresco*, and round them, after dusk, the hoppers lounge, and gossip, and sing, and dance, and squabble, and fight. Near such a fire I once heard an ex-student of Maynooth—at least such was his account of himself—warbling a Latin hymn in joyous tranquillity, like a pious lark, whilst a party of his scarcely more tattered countrymen and countrywomen were breaking, in a howling and screeching ‘free fight,’ one another’s heads, and the head of any Saxon rash or stupid enough to venture within the jaggedly eccentric circle of the combat. The ‘domestic’ conditions of the hop-pickers often seem pestilence-inviting to a theorist, but

they are used to such conditions, and in the country they have so much of fresh sunny air to aid them, that, as a rule, there, at any rate, they can manage to defy what seems to a sanitary theorist their inevitable fate.

Sometimes, however, in spite of sunny country air, pestilence does swoop down upon the hoppers—most literally with a vengeance. It is of such a time that I have to tell—as I can reproduce the story told me by Phœbe, the flower-seller, the only survivor then of the little family in which she had played, or rather genuinely performed, the part of mother. Phœbe's gravity—so out of keeping with her tender years—had struck me when I first saw her; but when she told me her story of death in the hop-gardens, the few months that had passed since we first became acquainted might have been years multi-

plied tenfold, so completely had she lost the merest trace of even the very little childlike gaiety she ever possessed.

The four children had been enlisted in a little party going down to Kent on foot, but little 'Em' was to have a seat in the tiny, donkey-drawn baggage-waggon of the party. Merrily they trooped out of their East-end quarters in the early September morning. Merrily they tramped across London Bridge—the blue-guernsey-ed, greasy-corded fish-buyers going up and down the steps leading to crowded Lower Thames Street and Billingsgate envying the hoppers as they passed. Merrily they turned down by the red church in the Borough, and so into the Old Kent Road —the prematurely sere leaves of its stunted garden-trees all clogged with dust; and up to and over dusty, brown-burned Black-heath; and so at last into a road that

began to look like country. The blackberries in the hedges were dusty, but Harriet and Dick hunted for them as if they had been peaches or pine-apples, and smeared their faces and fingers with the juice until they looked like jovial little cannibals. ‘Em’ sometimes joined them in their hunts, but poor little Em was weaker even than usual—it was chiefly for her sake that Phœbe had arranged to take her little family into the country: so little Em generally sat in the donkey-cart, supplied by Harriet and Dick with a good many more blackberries than she could have gathered for herself. As for Phœbe, she was far too staid a personage to indulge in any such frivolous pursuit as ‘blackberry-in,’ when no money could be made out of it.

All the party, young and old, except poor little Em, could ‘pad the hoof’ with-

out inconvenience. The change from the dingy, dung-scented streets in which they generally toiled about was so great that the walking hoppers thoroughly enjoyed their country tramp ; and little Em, who had only to tramp when she pleased, began to think that she must have been mysteriously metamorphosed into ‘ a lady.’

The hoppers camped out that night under the donkey-cart and in a dry ditch. There were nettles in the ditch, but Dick mowed them down with such vigorous valour that even tired little Em could not help laughing. The grown-up members of the party laughed again when Phœbe called her brood around her to say their prayers before they went to sleep ; but the laughter, though thoughtless, was not, for the most part, unkindly, and when Harriet and Dick appeared half inclined to mutiny, most of the elders, of whose ridicule they

had stood in dread, gruffly bade them do as they were bid. One more night the little party camped out, just outside Maidstone, on the Wrotham road; and then the chief of the party went into the town—speedily returning to conduct his followers to the work he had secured for them a mile or two beyond. They settled themselves in their compartment of the long row of hopper-houses, and then took holiday for the rest of that Saturday. Their picking was to begin upon the following Monday. Phœbe stayed at home with her little invalid, but Harriet and Dick roamed far and wide through the shady woods and sunny fields and lanes, revelling in the bright air and their freedom from the necessity of doing anything but amuse themselves. They came home very hungry to their evening meal. The kitchen fires were burning brightly. Laughing hoppers

were clustered about them cooking, or sitting in knots on the little strip of green in front of the hopper-houses, taking their suppers. And then one or two bonfires were lighted on the green, and the hoppers gathered round them, dancing, and joking, and singing—almost all of them in the best of tempers. Before the next Saturday night came round, fierce, foul language and savage blows had begun to interrupt the harmony of those open-air *soirées*; and when the Saturday after that came round, the penumbra of the awful shadow of death was stealing with the night-dusk over the little colony; but *that* Saturday night all was pleasurable excitement or peaceful rest upon the little green. The stars budded and suddenly blossomed into serene or trembling brilliance in the almost cloudless sky; the moon came up, and made the smoky fires look a little less cheerful from

their contrast to her silvery light; but Phœbe and Em still sat out upon the green—Em cuddled in Phœbe's motherly—almost grandmotherly—arms; each thinking, in her different way, that she had never been so happy before. Dick and Harriet, meanwhile, as happy in their way, zigzagged about in the moonlit dusk like bats—except that bats generally make no noise, and Dick and Harriet were about the noisiest people on the green. Their high spirits and Harriet's prettiness had already made them favourites in the hopper-colony. Phœbe grew anxious when she found that they did not 'mind' her as they had been accustomed to mind her in London. That was the sole drawback from her tranquil pleasure. She fussed about like a hen that wants to get its chickens to roost, when she thought that it was time at last for all of them to go to bed. Harriet and Dick

were both saucy when she told them to come in, but when they saw that Phœbe was half ready to cry, and that little Em was crying, at their disobedience, they came readily enough then. One or two of their grown-up companions were already stretching themselves on the straw that formed the common bed of the compartment—one or two who were not the best of the party, and who might, perhaps, have encouraged the young truants, if they had been inclined to strike against prayers again ; but Harriet and Dick, nevertheless, knelt down and began to say their prayers directly Phœbe bade them do so. She had roughly curtained off an angle of the hovel with an old shawl—almost the only *impedimentum* which the children had burdened the baggage-waggon with. Within that little screen the little vagrant could enjoy something of the ‘domesticity’ she liked, in

spite of her vagrancy. The children were soon sound asleep in the clean abundant straw. When all the other tenants of the hovel had rolled themselves up in their rugs, &c., and were snoring in the dim light of the lantern, hung slanting from the rough wall,—packed almost as tight as a drum of figs, the air of the hovel soon ceased to be pure, and before the middle of the next week the straw was anything but clean ; but all those bed-fellows were used to rude lodging, and did not break their hearts about such trifles.

On the Sunday morning Phœbe and her brood were allowed to get their turn at the washing-bowl pretty early by their grown-up and hobbydehoy companions, who, after their fashion, were almost all kind to the orphans, and then as the donkey-cart-owner who had engaged them ‘grubbed’ his party, the children were

free to spend the Sunday as they pleased—so long (if they wished to get any ‘grub’) as they were back to the common meals.

In spite of the numbers that had flocked into the country parish, the village church had few more worshippers than usual in it that Sunday morning. Perhaps even fewer, since some of the parishioners who had been engaged for the hop-picking had already been corrupted by the latitudinarianism of their strange fellow-workers, and, like them, preferred a snug snooze or a lazy lounge to church-going. A large percentage of the strangers were Roman Catholic Irish, and they, of course, could not be expected to go to an English Protestant church, even though the vicar might be, as they soon learned he was, very fond of Catholics: anxious to obtain for them at any cost of money or clerical dignity (from an ultra-Protestant point of

view) to himself, the spiritual consolation in their last moments which, much as they loved him and his for the kindness which he and his family bravely, self-denyingly bestowed upon all the pestilence-stricken strangers who had come within his parish's bounds, the Irish amongst them—to their grief, because they were so grateful—could not get from *him*. ‘Ah, sure, sir-r-r, ye'll belong to the ould Chur-r-ch yit,’ said an old Irishman to the vicar, when he had brought a priest with him to the old Irishman on his death-straw. I have no love for Romanism. It degrades the ‘poetry’ which, I think, it can rightly claim—the charm of historical continuity, and so on, and so on—by childish mummeries, and then, as it seems to me, it so terribly emasculates a man in a mental point of view. I can understand a very good man, with a sentimental bias, becoming a Romanist;

but how a man like Dr Newman—mentally as great as morally he is good—a man who could logically crumple up all the Ecumenical Council in one hand, and in the other almost all its Protestant critics—how such a great man amongst great men as he could have become and can continue a Romanist, especially now when Romanism wishes to formulize into a dogma its previously floating pretension of Papal Infallibility (*poor old Pio Nono infallible!*) by a counting of episcopal noses, attached, in spite of their episcopacy, to not the most brilliantly-witted of pates (from whatever part of the world the episcopal sheep may have blindly rushed, or have been painfully dogged, to *baa* in unison in the Papal hurdles)—*that* is a mystery to me. Notwithstanding, I can well understand how the vicar brought the priest to the old Irishman to guide and comfort him in his

last moments. It was only a Roman Catholic priest from whom the old Irishman would have accepted guidance and comfort then—and, after all, how much ‘the voice of the Church’ and ‘private judgment,’ in spite of their wrangling, leave in common to their respective votaries! Having relieved myself, moreover, by expressing my opinion of Romanism, I must in fairness add that a good many Protestants seem to me to exercise not a whit more ‘private judgment’ than the most ignorant Romanist does. He believes what he has been taught from his earliest days *his* Church requires him to believe, and *they*, with as much or as little reason, and with equal scrutiny, accept the dogmata of *their* Churches.

Phœbe marshalled her little troop to the village church in the morning, but in the afternoon Dick and Harriet again

played truant. They professed that they would rather go to church in Maidstone, and they certainly started in the direction of its grey old church, grey, ivy-clad old palace, and grey old ‘college,’ with its famous hop-garden of gigantic poles, which they could see from their barracks rising above the Medway beyond the lock ; but neither Dick nor Harriet swelled the congregation of All Saints’ that afternoon. They got into trouble, and were saucy when Phœbe scolded them on their late return. ‘I got into a temper, sir,’ poor Phœbe told me, ‘an’ told ’em that me and Em would git on twice as well if they was gone for good—that none of the children was anythink but a bother to me. That made poor little Em cry, and then Dick and ’Arriet began to cry. Little did I think what was a-goin’ to ’appen. If I’d

known it then, I'd 'a' cut my tongue out fust, afore I'd 'a' said it.'

However, the children were soon reconciled, and next morning went to work in high glee. The pickers took their stands along the lines of bins, the bines were cut, the poles plucked up and slanted against the bins, and the pickers' fingers began to strip the tall *thyrsi* of their grape-like clusters, only resting when the tally-man and his assistants came along with his bushel-measure, tallies, and sacks. Such standing-still work seemed so much like play to the little Londoners that it was hard for them to believe that they had been promised more a day for it than they had ever earned by their wearisome trampings through London streets. Sweet air sighed lazily about them, leaf-chequered sunlight fell upon them almost constantly; tan-sailed

barges now and then noiselessly crept past the bottom of the hill, on the slope of which the children were working, and the monotonous wooden rumble of the river-side paper-mill, after a time, did not seem much more out of harmony with the calm sunshine than the gliding barges did.

‘ I should like to go ‘opping all the year round,’ said little Dick, ‘ wouldn’t you, ’Arriet ? ’ Poor vain little Harriet tossed her pretty little head, and said that *she* didn’t mean to go working much longer ; she’d ‘ave somebody as would be glad to work for her, soon ‘s ever she was growed-up.

Dick and Harriet thought it great fun when the pickers in their hop-field struck. ‘ Eight to the shilling ’ had been the tally agreed upon, but, after a few hours’ grumbling, the pickers suddenly knocked off work, and became so clamorous and men-

acing in their demands for a reduction of the tale to six, that the local pickers who had been—very willingly—forced into the strike by their cosmopolitan colleagues, grew scared at the violence of their allies, and the hop-grower began to think that he must ride into Maidstone to get a magistrate to let the commandant of the Cavalry Depôt know what was going on. Such scenes terrified poor little Em. They disgusted grave Phœbe. ‘What’s the good of it?’ she said to me. ‘If the masters give in, you might ha’ arned pretty nigh as much, if you’d gone on workin’ without making a to-do—shoutin’ and fightin’ an’ that, an’ nobody to pay you for your time.’

The riotous scenes which soon took place in and about the hopper-houses in the evening also terrified Em and disgusted Phœbe; whilst Dick and Harriet rather enjoyed the tumult. But on the whole—up

to that Saturday I have named—grave Phœbe was quietly comfortable in the hop-fields ; although she could not help feeling rather anxious when she found that little Em grew no stronger, and was mortified, as well as honestly grieved, at discovering that Dick and Harriet were becoming less amenable to her motherly discipline.

When the hoppers left London, cholera was raging in it. There were streets in and about Shoreditch and St George's in the East through which people who did not belong to them did not care to pass, or if considerations of time and fatigue did compel them to take such routes, they shunned the footpaths with their foul-breathed doorways and court-entrances, and took the roadway, as in the old plague-times, avoiding jostling with those they met in a space-wasting way that was strange on the part of bustling Londoners, who generally look

as if they were running a race for their lives against Time. *These* were dodging a race for their lives against Cholera. Fruit and vegetables were very plentiful that autumn : but green-grocers and costermongers and street-market sellers in the poor parts of London complained that it was no use being able to buy cheap, when their customers had got it into their heads that 'greens and sich was p'ison.' 'I'd sell my barrerful for what I give for it,' said a costermonger of my acquaintance at that time. "'Alf price they should 'ave it, if it come to that ; but they won't 'ave nothing to speak of at no price. Blow the doctors!—putting sich maggots into folks' 'eads, an' robbin' honest men o' their livin'. Where's the 'arm to anybody of a ripe Horlines plum, I'd like to know? Blow them doctors! says I.' It was partly the thought that they were escaping from a

plague-stricken city that made our hoppers so merry as they crossed London Bridge. They fancied that they were giving cholera the slip, but it followed them down into the country. The hoppers lived in the country, when within-doors, with as little regard to health as when in town. Perhaps, knowing as they thought themselves in comparison with the ‘yokels,’ their country purveyors palmed off, under the guise of ‘bargains,’ worse provisions upon them than they would have been permitted to buy in London—even if so disposed. At any rate, cholera broke out amongst them. On that third Saturday night there was a sound of lamentation and great woe at the Irish end of the row of hovels in which our children were housed. Cholera had claimed its first victim in rural Kent, and old Irishwomen were *keening* over the corpse. Next day the dread disease began

to pick off the hoppers as if they were hops. It was a dreary Sunday, though the sun never shone more serenely bright than it shone then. Doctors were coming and going. The vicar left out the Litany in the morning, and curtailed his sermons, both in the morning and the afternoon, in order to return more speedily to his work amongst the dying. An awful week followed. The hoppers no longer laughed over their work, or laughed with a drunken defiance of Death. The ‘cramps’ seized them as they stood beside the bins. The clergyman and his wife and daughters took sleep and food in hastiest snatches in their anxiety to get back to their livid, awfully contorted patients. The Anglican vicar, as I have previously intimated, sent for Romanist priests, and piloted them himself to their writhing, clammily perspiring co-religionists. They died so fast that a

huge, gaping common grave had to be dug for them in the green, quiet old church-yard. They were put into it by twos and threes, and every now and then a Roman Catholic priest would come to such a funeral, and take off his hat in genuine reverence, whilst the Anglican Catholic, whose catholicity he then, at least, was eagerly anxious to acknowledge, read the solemn service in a voice broken by weariness and sorrow. That huge, gaping grave, in which scores are buried, is covered now with grass and daisies that look as if grass and daisies had grown there for ever. The barges glide by at the bottom of the hill, the paper-mill pounds monotonously, just as they did before. Hoppers swarm down into the parish, and frolic and fight as of old ; although the old hands look serious for a minute or two when they talk of that old time, and the new hands cannot help

shuddering a little when they hear the story, and see the simple stone that marks the resting-place of Death's greedy double handful. But Phœbe has never recovered from the shock she then received. The family with whom she has lived almost ever since all speak highly of her, except that the children belonging to or visiting the house, cannot help saying now and then, though they *are* very fond of her, ‘She’s got no fun in her; she gets tired of playing so soon.’

Harriet, Emma, and Dick were buried in that common grave down in Kent. In spite of their higher spirits and greater strength, Harriet and Dick died before weak little Emma. ‘Kiss me, Phœbe,’ she said, when, just before her death, she was momentarily relieved from the horrid tortures of her disease. ‘I’m going to see Jesus Christ, *a’n’t I*, Phœbe?’

‘ ‘Arriet and Dick didn’t ax me to kiss ’em afore *they* was took ; they was too bad, poor dears. Awful bad they was,’ said Phœbe, for the first time breaking into a sob as she told me her sad story. ‘ But they would ’a’ done, bad as they was, if they’d known’ow I wanted it. They was dear good children, though they wouldn’t mind ye some times ; that they was, poor dears. An’ so was poor dear little Hemmer. I’ve only myself to look to now, sir ; but God’s al’ays good, I don’t doubt, though sometimes it don’t look like it.’

IV.

MY GREENGROCER.

SOME people write and talk as if the mere fact of a man's having to work hard made him an object of pity. I have no sympathy with such maudlin laziness. There is scarcely any one in any rank of life, really worth calling a man, who has *not* to work hard. A navvy works hard, a puddler works hard, but I doubt whether, even in the matter of physical endurance, they work *as* hard as a successful lawyer or a conscientious Cabinet minister with

the settlement of the Irish Question on his mind. All four like their work, according to their various fashions. They are proud of their power of working, and enjoy its remuneration in the shape of superior wages, huge retaining fees and refreshers, professional reputation, social honour, historical fame achieved before the winner has had the chance of learning from his own experience how hollow a delight historical renown may possibly be to those of its possessors already, in the literal, dead-and-buried sense, historical; &c., &c. Men highly-paid, in any sense, for their piece-work, very probably, get far less pleasure out of life than they might, if they were not quite so eager to tax their powers to the uttermost; but that is their own lookout. Very possibly, too, such pleasure as they do get, after the first delicious taste of it, may not seem half as delicious

as they fancied it would be, when they first girded up their loins, literally or metaphorically, for their various struggles; but highly-paid, successful skilled workers are not the only people in the world doomed to find that, however hard they may work, realized facts do not correspond with Fancy's dreams about such facts. It is when men, women, and children—a great many of them manifestly too weak for the work they have undertaken (humble enough though it may be)—have, nevertheless, to toil on at that work (unless they would become grudgingly-fed paupers, or at once consent to die,—after all, at the parish's expense), without any hope of a brighter earthly morrow, and for present pay that cannot secure them the sufficient food, drink, clothing, and shelter of which the lower, the lowest, animals are generally sure until their death comes: it

is under such circumstances that hard work becomes a proper object for pity. Work, *per se*, is a blessing rather than a curse for man. How miserable people who have nothing to do, which they feel they *must* do, generally are! Upper-class triflers, I fancy, submit to what seem to outsiders like myself ‘Society’s’ frequently idiotically labour-exacting requirements, because they find some comfort, in their lack of anything real to do, in trying to believe that they are under a moral obligation to obey those labour-exacting requirements. The retired shopkeeper grows weary of his retirement, and goes back, under the excuse of its being a busy time for the new comer, to the shop whose ‘overwhelming custom’ was the reason why he disposed of it—takes off his coat, borrows an apron, and serves ‘for love’ behind the counter. If the thousands of poor in whose midst I

live, and have lived for years,—some of them, doubtless, lazy enough, but the majority of them hard-workers at ‘starvation-wages,’ or, worse still, seekers-in-vain for work that would win such wages—if these poor creatures could only obtain work that would give them something like decent support, coupled with a hope of being able to improve the conditions of life for themselves and their children, in however modest a progression, I would not care how hard they worked—within bounds of reason. It is the *hopelessness* of East End labour—the typical bulk of it—that makes it so depressing a spectacle. The East End, of course, houses many honest earners of high wages, and also dishonest winners of precarious but occasionally very considerable gains—the latter kind of exceptional pecuniosity, it is almost needless to say, only makes the general spectacle the

more depressing. But the people I am referring to constitute the bulk of the population of many a district in the East End—the ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed men, women, and children who try, according to their lights, to earn ‘an honest living’ by fingers, limbs, backs, and voices, and, after all their trouble, get only enough to enable them to work again next day for their sorry, charmless, temper-souring ‘livelihood,’ whilst some of them look upon even such a livelihood as ‘easy circumstances’ beyond their reach.

Theoretically, of course, the son of the poorest man in England can be raised to the House of Lords, as Lord Chancellor or Archbishop of Canterbury—if only he has wit enough, and can get the other necessary preliminary qualifications. The theory is indisputable, and, often as it has been laughed at, is still occasionally aired at

Charity Dinners, with great complacency, by genuinely excellent old and middle-aged gentlemen breathing forth universal benevolence, and hope for everybody, from comfortable, well-fed, decorously wine-scented lips.

But I do not think that any East End clergyman—anxious to convince his poor that they had a chance in this life as well as the next—ever used that theory as an argument. If he did, I can imagine the apathetic disregard, or the fierce disdain, which his prophecy of smooth things met with.

Under these circumstances it is a great relief to stumble now and then on an East End struggler who has honestly worked his way to competence.

My greengrocer is now a well-to-do man, who could buy his clergyman up a dozen times over. He is a churchwarden,

keeps his horse and chaise, and on Sundays wears a ‘chimney-pot’ hat, a suit of glossy black broadcloth, enlivened in summer with a spotless white waistcoat, and a handsome gold watch and chain. He is often spoken of deferentially as Mr Mixon, but I remember him when he was only known as Civil Sam, and was too poor even to keep a donkey. He is as civil and as right-principled now as he was then, and, therefore, it has been a pleasure to watch him expanding into his present portly proportions, commercial and personal.

When but a mere boy, Sam, who was then very small as well as young, found himself under the necessity of picking up a living as best he could in London streets. Paved with gold, according to the old childish belief, they certainly prove, in a secondary sense, to some lucky adventurers;

but the bits of orange-peel with which they are littered are the nearest approach to gold which those who have to make London pavements their place of business generally find upon them.

However, there was nothing very particular in Sam's having to turn out to get his living in London streets—hundreds of children have to do the like. What was exceptional in his case was that the parents whose death had sent him adrift, had never soured his naturally sunny disposition by ill-usage, and if they had done little else for him, they had taught him that dishonesty in word or deed was a despicable thing.

Sam soon had his principles put to the test. When the young vagrants who prowl in London streets see another lad as friendless as themselves, wandering about like them, shyly creeping into their night

resting-places, but yet not otherwise adopting their mode of life, they are very anxious to make him altogether just such a one as themselves. This feeling may, perhaps, partly spring from the spirit of proselytism that prevails in all grades of life—the desire people of all kinds have that all whom they come in contact with shall adopt their views, and tar themselves, whether for better or worse, with their brush. But the young Arabs, I fancy, are partly actuated by a less selfish feeling than this. In their ignorance, for which *they* are not responsible, they think that it would be a kind thing to teach the novice to steal. They pity him in their rough way because he has to share with them the ‘hard lines’ of street life, without enjoying any of the alleviations which they can make it yield. Sam went with his new friends—glad enough at first of their company—in their

slinking rambles about the markets and the shops that displayed small easily-portable portions of bacon, &c., on slabs outside. The Arabs were not altogether disinterested in their kindness. They wished to utilize Sam's innocent face, and soon informed him that they would not continue to give him grub, if he was ungrateful enough not to employ his natural advantages for the purpose of slipping up unsuspected and carrying off the articles which they directed him how to appropriate. Sam was grateful for the grub, but still he would not obey his young tutors' instructions. He said that it wasn't honest to steal—father and mother had told him so ; and then his new instructors derided him in chorus as a ' b—— flat.' That was a hard imputation for a boy to bear, but Sam still stuck to his principles. But when his comrades went on to taunt him as a coward,

Sam at last lost his temper. Such behaviour, he thought, cancelled the obligation under which he lay for grub. ‘I couldn’t ‘elp pitchin’ into one on ’em, sir,’ Sam long afterwards told me, ‘and I licked him, though he were ’alf a ’ead taller than me. I didn’t want ’em to think that I worn’t game to do a thing, if it was only right to do it.’

After that pugilistic vindication of the principles of honesty, Sam’s tempters regarded him with a surly kind of respect; but they parted company with him, and he was very lonely.

One bleak November day, Sam was wandering along the bleak Whitechapel Road, wondering how he was to earn a penny, when he saw an old gentleman on horseback, who was looking about as if he wanted somebody to hold his horse. Sam ran up to him just as he stopped before a

door, and touching his tattered cap, profered his services.

'*You don't look as if you could be trusted,*' said the old gentleman, when he had dismounted.

'Yes, sir, I can,' answered Sam sturdily.

'Well, take hold of the bridle, then, and just walk him up and down ; but mind there'll be somebody looking out of the window at you all the time.'

In about a quarter of an hour, the old gentleman came out of the house again, in a very bad temper.

'Oh, you *haven't* run away, then,' he said, when Sam brought the horse up to the pavement for him—speaking almost as if he felt aggrieved at the non-justification of his suspicions. 'There's sixpence for you.'

So having said, he put half a sovereign into Sam's hand, mounted, and ambled off.

When Sam found that he had got gold in his hand, he felt sure that a mistake had been made, and rushed after the old gentleman, shouting, ‘Hi, sir! Stop, sir!’ But the old gentleman had been ruffled by his visit, and so merely turning round to shake his whip, and growl, ‘You saucy young rascal! Sixpence was a deal too much,’ he put his heels into his horse’s sides, and urged him into a trot. But Sam put on extra steam, seized the old gentleman’s off-leg, and holding up the half-sovereign, panted out—

‘ You guv me *this*, sir ! ’

The old gentleman reined up when he saw the gleam of gold.

‘ Hey, hey,’ he said—‘ don’t believe I did. Never made a mistake about money in my life. Yet I must, or how could *you* have got it? No, I didn’t. I’m up to your tricks. It’s brass, and you want to be paid

for shamming honest. No, it isn't,' the old man added, when he had examined the coin, and, to make assurance doubly sure, had found that a half-sovereign was lacking in the pinch of change he took out of his waistcoat-pocket. 'Well, there's sixpence for you now—and, after all, it's more than you've earned. I suppose, though, you'll expect me to give you something extra; so—give me back the sixpence—here's a shilling for you.'

'Thankee, sir. I'm very much obliged,' said Sam, touching his cap again, and turning away.

'Hi, boy, stop! What do you mean by going away like that? I suppose I must let you have the sixpence too. If you'd kept the half-sovereign, you'd have had nine and sixpence that you'd no kind of right to, and a bad conscience; now you've a shilling that you've *really* no right

to, and an easy mind—and that must be worth a good bit more than the other eight shillings. It's a bad plan—a very bad plan—paying people to be honest in that fashion. People ought to do what's right without a premium. However, you must keep it now that you have got it. Good-bye, boy. Be honest next time without thinking you'll get paid for it ;' and the old gentleman trotted off, leaving the possessor of 'an easy mind' also in delighted possession of a capital of eighteenpence.

'The old gent were a bit of a screw, I fancy,' was Sam's comment on this story ; 'and he worn't fair, besides, because I didn't want him to give me nuffink, but I see there was sense in what he said. Father and mother used to say jest the same—on'y they said it in a nicer sort o' way.'

At the lodging-house at which Sam

slept that night, he heard some of his fellow-lodgers talking about what they had made by ‘working sprats.’

‘Sprats was jest in, you see, sir,’ Sam explained to me. ‘They comes in with the Lord Mayor. Some says that it ain’t lawful to eat ’em till he’s ’ad fust feed off ’em at his feast. That’s nonsense, in course; but he might go furder and fare wuss. Fried sprats of a cold night is as tasty and as fillin’ a meal as a man ’ad need to ’ave. Folks says it’s wulgar to eat ’em; but I don’t care about that. I’m wulgar myself, though, thank God, I can keep a banker now-a-days. And where’ll you see a prettier fish than them plump little silver things? Them as turns up their noses at ’em when they’re sprats, becos they’re so common that down in Essex they uses ’em for muck, relishes the sprats, I’ve heard, when they’re turned into anchovies and sardines. It’s

queer that folks can't believe their own mouths, but must wait for other folks to tell 'em what it's proper to say a thing tastes like.'

On the morning after that night's sojourn in the lodging-house, Sam invested part of his capital in a basket, and another in a joint-purchase at Billingsgate of a 'chuck' of sprats; and on sprats he managed to make a living until the season was over.

Afterwards he engaged himself to a costermonger as 'barker;' and the costermonger, I have no doubt, was very glad to get so shrill-voiced, sharp-eyed, industrious, civil a little barker. He had no objection either to Sam's honesty, when *he* reaped the benefit of it. Sam could be trusted not to take a penny more than his fair 'bunse,' when left to sell off his master's remnant stock; but he could not

anyhow be got to tell his master's customers what he knew to be lies. He unconsciously meted and weighed out to them many a lie in fruit and vegetables, before he was initiated into the mystery of 'slang' weights and measures—half-pound weights beaten out to look like pound weights, quart measures with bottoms so thick as only to hold a pint and a half, &c. When he was initiated, Sam set up his back. 'Why, you young gonoph,' reasoned his master, 'the shopkeepers does it, and charges full prices; and hain't *we* a right to, when we sells thinx cheap at people's wery doors? They charges ye more for the slangs than they does for the t'others, so, ye see, the slangs is the superior article, Sam,' added the master, hoping to muddle and muzzle his barker with his joke; but Sam was not to be muddled or muzzled. If shopkeepers did what was mean, that

was no reason why he should have a hand in doing what was mean too.

'I was sorry to leave old Ted,' Mr Mixon informed me. 'I was gittin' used to him, and him and his old woman had treated me uncommon well, and he'd put me up to thinkx in the way of business that was of use to me, and said he'd make a man of me. The costers and the costers' women is often wery kind to their boys. It's their hinterest in course, but, let alone that, I'd taken a likin' to old Ted. But I worn't goin' to do what I knew was wrong. 'Tworn't much I knew about right and wrong in them days, but I knew this much, that it couldn't be right to take the money for a pound o' 'taties, an' on'y give 'alf a pound. "Well," says Ted, "well, Sam," says he, "if you won't stay, I can't make ye, and there's lots o' boys I can 'ave my pick out on. But some'ow I'd rather

you'd stayed on—you've a way with ye the women like. You're a flat, Sam, for all you seem so sharp sometimes. If you think you're a-goin' to make a livin' on the square, I wish you may get it, my tulip! 'Tain't to be done, Sam. I don't doubt you'll sell, an' you'll be sold, too;—them as buys of you will think ye b—— perlitful, an' then they'll laugh at ye, Sam. But I don't bear malice Sam. If you wants to start on your own hook—that's what it comes to, I s'pose—I'll lend ye a trifle for stock-money. I don't doubt you'll pay me back, though I can't tumble to your barrikin. I wish your old father and mother 'ad been furder. Much good *they* got by keepin' on the square. I'd 'a' made a man on ye, Sam."

Accordingly, Sam did start as a costermonger on his 'own hook'—and he was only a little younger than many a coster-lad

who does the same. When still children, so far as years go, the young male costers take lodgings and female helpmates, and the young couples labour for the common living with a persistent, often cheerful, industry, that makes a feeling of half-respect temper one's shuddering regret that they should have been united so early, and in such a heathenish way. The poor girls claim the larger amount of our pity. They are generally true to their unfaithful little tyrants, who, nevertheless, are brutally jealous. The girls work even harder than the boys, but the small 'master of the house' spends the lion's share of the common earnings on smart Sunday dress, drink, gambling, 'sport,' and 'twopenny hops,' and threepenny theatre-galleries, to which the soon despised mistress is often only taken as a special favour.

Acute after a fashion, as pugilistic as

game-cocks, law-defying, hard-working, often very cruel, very ignorant, and yet, in spite of their frequent brutality—of course I am describing a class in broad lines that do not admit of delicate shading—grateful for kindness, generally staunch friends to their fellows when in distress, and kind to the ponies and donkeys they drive, although sometimes they punch the heads of the women they live with ; blurt-ing out, moreover, in their dealings with the non-costermonger world, startling opinions as to the ‘rights of things ;’—take ’em all round, the costermongers seem to me an independently peculiar people, piquantly inviting to those who *need* a peculiar people to stimulate their desire to make their fellow-creatures zealous of good works. Civil Sam was, however, an ex-ceptional costermonger. He had taken to the business quite young enough to become

an expert buyer and salesman ; but still he had not been brought up in the traditions of the fraternity, and continued civil and honest after he had become a costermonger.

‘Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem
Testa diu.’

At first it seemed as if old Ted’s prediction in reference to the impossibility of making a living ‘on the square’ would be fulfilled in Sam’s case. He had to borrow capital at an interest of more than a thousand per cent. per annum. Before he could save money enough to buy a barrow, he had to pay a good deal more than its cost for the use of the one he hired. He would not palm off stinking fish on drunken people, half-fill a strawberry pottle with crushed leaves, mix bad apples and cherries with good, and then sell them as if all good ; prick his oranges, boil his oranges and plums ;

or use a weight or measure that could not have stood the periodical inspection, which made a good many of the shopkeepers—who looked down upon Sam as a ‘low character’—tremble. His fellow-costers could not make him out. He did not care for beer, or boxing, or running, or skittles, or cards, or tossing, or ‘hops,’ or dog-fighting, or rat-killing, or pigeon-fancying, or assisting as an outsider at the Red House and Hornsey Wood pigeon-matches. Sam sometimes went, on business, to the metropolitan racecourses; occasionally he recreated himself, in his sober fashion, at the theatre; like most costermongers, he abstained from work and dressed smart on Sundays. But then Sam went to church! and Sam never swore! He never preached, except in the way of example; but his mates, nevertheless, called him the Parson. He was a mystery

to them. Some said that he was a ‘gallus soft,’ and some that he was a sneaking spy. Sam would have been sent to Coventry by his mates, had it not been for the sour kind of respect which they could not help feeling for him, in spite of the opprobrious terms in which they characterized him behind his back; for Sam, though honest and inoffensive, was keen, and an ‘ugly customer’ when any one attempted to ride rough-shod over him, and likewise for the hearty way in which he not only joined them in the ‘raffles,’ &c., got up for distressed members of the brotherhood, but also—when he had begun to save money, diminished his earnings, without any chance of personal benefit—for costers who had ‘come to grief.’ Precarious gains and improvident habits make such cases of distress very common amongst London street-sellers. It is said that three con-

tinuous days of downpouring rain in London will bring ten thousand times as many street-sellers very near to the verge of starvation.

But I am anticipating matters. Sam gradually advanced from the ‘prickle’ and the ‘shallow’ and the head-basket to the hired hand-barrow, and so on to the owned barrow—dealing in the strange variety of produce which London markets supply to the versatile commercial genius of London street distributors. Flowers ‘all a-blowing, all a-growing;’ rhubarb, radishes, potatoes, onions, lettuces, green peas, summer cabbages, scarlet runners, French beans, broad beans, ‘colliflowers,’ ‘cow-cumbers,’ sweet herbs, Brussels sprouts; the rich variety of English fruits, English cobnuts and walnuts; Turkey filberts, Brazil nuts, Barcelona nuts, cocoanuts; almonds and raisins, oranges and

lemons, dates, figs, Peninsular grapes purchased, packed in sawdust, from Duke's Place, pines from the West Indies, bananas from Madeira; fish, wet and dry, from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Norway; hearthstone, great slabs of salt—these were *some* of the articles in which Sam dealt. Whatever was the article, Sam tried to supply his customers with the best specimen of it he could fairly offer at the price he asked, and always gave full weight and measure.

'A knave is only a fool with a circumbendibus,' says Coleridge; 'honesty, after all, *is* the best policy,' the old man admitted, who also confessed that he had 'tried both ways.' Sam's pleasant face and civil tongue did something towards securing him a constantly increasing round of regular customers, but his fairness of dealing did more. He sometimes charged

a little more than other costermongers charged, and therefore lost some customers amongst those who held the too prevalent, very idiotic belief, that mere absolute lowness of price constitutes cheapness ; but a good many people soon learnt that both Sam and his goods could be trusted ; and his ‘connection’ widened like a circle in water. Whilst old Ted, who had confidently prophesied Sam’s failure, was still painfully propelling a hand-barrow, Sam was able to go to ‘Smiffle Races,’—*i.e.*, the cattle market, on Friday afternoon, and purchase a smart donkey, and the donkey was soon superseded by a still handsomer little fast-trotting pony. The harness was brass-mounted, and Sam kept the brass so brightly polished, the leather so neatly black, the fast-trotter so sleek and conscientiously groomed, the knowing-looking little cart so clean and gaily painted,—and

the driver, moreover, was always so spruce and ‘civil spoken,’ that Sam was regarded as an ‘eligible young man’ by the sprucest servants in the shopless streets which constituted the, comparatively, ‘genteeel’ portion of Sam’s ‘connection.’ They would have turned up their noses at most costermongers, even if the costermongers had been disposed to persecute them with matrimonial addresses, but they did not call Sam a costermonger. As soon as he reined up the fast-trotter before their doors, they would run in to their mistresses with a ‘Please’m, the general dealer has called—what do we want to-day, mum?’ Sam was almost as great a favourite, in a different way, with the mistresses as he was with the maids. He was commissioned to procure geese for Michaelmas Day, turkeys for Christmas Day, fowls for other special occasions, and fruit and fish and vegetables

that he did not keep in stock, for invalids ; and he always supplied articles both so cheap and so good that the unconscionable mistresses made him a ‘ general dealer ’ on their behalf for all kinds of things that were utterly out of his line. ‘ There was one lady as got me to buy a cradle for her, and another a warming-pan,’ said grinning Sam.

Sam married one of the nattiest of the maid-servants, and took her to preside over the coals-and-greens shed of which he had become the proprietor. A coals-and-greens shed is the *ne plus ultra* of most costermongers’ ambition, but it was not to be the limit of Sam’s success. At first he left his wife and a boy to manage the business of the shed, whilst he still took his rounds behind the fast-trotting pony ; but the business of the shed increased so that Sam had to stay at home, and hire another hand.

He has quite a handsome greengrocer's shop, with knobbed and polished brass-rails, &c., in a leading East End thoroughfare now, and keeps three horses; but his prosperity has not spoiled him. Mrs Mixon, perhaps, is a trifle bumptious and grasping; but Sam is as civil, and honest, and kind-hearted as ever. There is no man in the parish, though it contains the business-places of some very wealthy non-residents, who subscribes more liberally and ungrudgingly to all kinds of parish charities than Mr Mixon—if only he can be appealed to out of hearing of Mrs Mixon, and be got to commit himself to a definite sum before he has had a chance of consulting her. Mrs Mixon, ex-maid of all work, has become, as she thinks, 'aristocratic' in her views, and is of opinion that if people are poor, of course it's their own fault, and so it's a sin, and only 'makes 'em sarcy,' if

'respectable people as 'as al'ays paid their way, an' got ten times the money now some o' them shabby-genteels that thinks theirselves sich swells can bless 'emselves with,' put their hands in their pockets to 'elp sich riff-raff.'

'They didn't arn the money—so why should they git it?' says Mrs Mixon.

Such talk is not pleasing to Mr Mixon, but he stands rather in dread of the sharp tongue of Mrs Mixon, who has been a shrewdly-good wife to him: so it is well to get him to put his name down on a subscription list before he has had an opportunity of 'talking the matter over' with his wife. There is a comical mixture of satisfaction and fearful foreboding on his countenance when he has put down his name for a handsome amount. He knows that he will 'catch it,' but he knows also that the thing cannot be undone; and so he returns to

the inevitable lecture with a cheerfulness which is not altogether feigned.

I will merely add one little sample of Mr Mixon's kindness, as I heard it related, by no means in terms of praise, by Mrs Mixon.

'M.'s as good a 'usband as a woman need wish to 'ave, 'owever genteel she may 'ave been brought up,' said Mrs M. ' And he knows his business too, I don't deny—so far as buyin' goes; but when it comes to sellin', though you mightn't think it, sir, of me as 'ad never to stand behind a counter afore I married M., the business 'ud go to rack and ruin if I wasn't to keep my eyes about me. He's sharp in a sort o' way, is M., an' yet he's silly too, though he *is* my 'usband. Why, sir, one day, when we'd the other shop, M. was standin' outside servin', an' there was a lot o'

women about pickin' out their pertaturs. There was one draggle-tail as I kept my eye on, as well as I could servin' inside. She looked as if she didn't know the taste o' meat, an' she'd two or three o' her beggar brats 'angin' on to 'er. She was sich a time, an' she looked so scared when she see *me* a-lookin' at her, that I felt sure she was up to no good. Presen'ly I see her slip a pertatur into her skirts, an' out I shouted. For a wonder M. see her too, and cotched her 'and, an' pulled out a bag with a good four pounds o' pertaturs in it, that M. 'ad let 'er prig afore his wery nose. Out she busts screechin' an' cryin' for mercy, an' talkin' about the lots o' 'ungry kids she'd got at 'ome. "Send for the pollis, M.—give her in charge this minute, M.," says I. But M. wouldn't 'ave it. He gives her a look, and then he gives her a lectur', and

pretty strong he pitched it—I'll say that for him, for M. can't abide sich mean ways—but then—could you believe it, sir?—*he give her the pertaturs!* I never was so disgusted in all my born days, an' so I told him, right out afore all the people in the shop. I felt downright ashamed o' my 'usband—makin' hisself sich a soft afore them as was sure to take adwantage of it. And M. worn't content with that. He must find out where that old 'ussy lived, an' bother his 'ead to git her work. If she 'adn't been sich a old fright—fit a'most to be his mother—I should ha' thought there was more in it than M. was willin' to own to. We've got two of her boys a-workin' for us now. I don't say they don't do their work, an' I hain't caught 'em priggin' *yet*. They knows I looks after 'em pretty sharp. But we shall see some day who's right.

What's bred in the bone, you know, sir,
won't come out o' the flesh. It ain't re-
spectable to employ sich wulgar riff-raff in
a shop like ourn. Them's my opinions,
sir, and I don't care who knows 'em.'

V.

THE PATERNOSTERS.

‘How on earth can it be made for the money?’ is a remark often made, when the money has been paid, by the purchasers of ‘cheap, natty-looking’ articles. Such articles, in reality, are *not* cheap, because they are not really *made*, but simply put together with sufficient showiness and adhesiveness to last until they *have* been bought. When the bloom has suddenly vanished, and the dissolution of continuity suddenly takes place, the buyers who, fancying that they

had got unheard-of bargains, had bestowed cheap pity on the makers of the cheap wares, proceed to lavish unmeasured abuse upon those ‘knavish’ people. But if the conditions under which such scamped work is ‘finished’ at the East End were generally known, a good many of its disappointed—after all, the prices given being taken into consideration, not really defrauded—purchasers would still, I think, continue to pity ‘the poor creatures who made it.’

One day a ragged, dirty little toddler—so little that, after having drummed in vain upon the door, she was obliged to ask a passer-by to use the knocker for her—came to my house, and told the servant that she had been sent to ‘fetch the parson.’

When I went out to the poor little woman, she told me that I must come at once, because mother was taken so bad—

father would have come, but he was too busy, she was to say, and she must hurry back to her work—poor little toddler!—so would I come at once please, because, please, she'd to show me where it was?

She gave me the name of her mother, and the name of the street to which she was to take me; but I recognized neither. Paternoster was the surname—not so exceptional, I have found, as I thought it then.

As I walked back with the poor little thing, I could see that, anxious as she was about her mother, and impressed though she was with the necessity of returning speedily to her ‘work,’ she could not help enjoying the brief respite from it which she had got, and also the ‘sensational’ importance of having been ‘sent for the parson.’ She piloted me into a stifling little street leading out of the Old Bethnal Green

Road. The street was unpaved, dusty, pitted with cracked, desiccated mud-puddles, and littered with stinking herring-heads and wilted outside cabbage-leaves. Most of the mean, black-jaundiced houses on both sides had weavers' many-paned, horizontally-oblong casements in their upper floors, although silk-weavers no longer constituted the bulk of the street's swarming, struggling, half-starving population. My little guide steered me up a filthy, crooked, crazy staircase to an upper floor so lighted, and into a room that smelt of sawdust, shavings, glue, shellac, rancidly-oiled metal, and all kinds of rankly or mustily malodorous muddle. This was the workshop of the Paternosters—their kitchen and meal-room, also the bed-room of some of them—the rest huddled at night in the smaller inner room, in which, the door being ajar, I could hear poor Mrs

Paternoster gasping for a breath of fresh air.

As soon as we entered the workshop, my guide, little Polly Paternoster, went back to her place at the bench, and hopped on to the dirty, splintered egg-box which brought her up to the level of her ‘work,’ like a weary little trained finch, compelled to begin drawing up its little bucket once more. Small as Polly Paternoster was, there was a smaller Jane Paternoster hard at work next to her at the bench. Hard at work, but, oh, so wearily at work. Poor little Jane seemed to grudge the ‘outing’ which Polly had had. If Jane had only known where the parson lived, *she* would have been sent for him, because Polly’s labour was a trifle more valuable than Jane’s, and in that family the slightest difference in receipts was of serious importance. A boy of thirteen, another of

twelve, and two other girls a year or two older than Polly, were the rest of the young workers—poor stunted little creatures all of them, and with that dreary half-knowing, half-stupefied look which premature care prints on children's faces. The father was stooping to take a glue-pot off the fire when I went in, and until he turned round, I thought that *he* was a boy too—he was so narrow across the back. His apron was ragged, but the trousers it professed to protect were more tattered still. Between his high, cramped shoulders, which looked as if they would soon meet beneath his nose, there drooped one of the saddest faces I ever saw in my life—the face of a thoroughly beaten man. Not that there was any acute sorrow visible in it. The eyes were dull, and the general expression of the haggard, unshaven face was simply stolid. But a dismal biography was writ-

ten in its dirty crow's-feet and crossing wrinkles—a life of daylong struggles for daily bread continued for years, with an ever-haunting anxiety that, when the high-pressure work, in which no workman's pride could be taken as *honest* work, at last was done, even the wretched price given for such work might not be forthcoming; however he might wheedle the shopkeepers who made their profits out of his necessities and their customers' passion for 'bargains:' a life that had now become utterly hopeless, since his trade was growing worse and worse—the only trade to which his six surviving children could be brought up, the trade in which his other children had died, and in which his wife was dying.

'She's in there, sir,' said the cabinet-maker, pointing over his shoulder to the

inner room, as he went back to his bench with the glue-pot.

'Thank you, sir, for coming,' panted the poor woman, when I had seated myself beside her wretched bed. Ill as she was, she was fitting in the flimsy blue lining of a cheap work-box. 'Yes, sir, I'm bad—*very* bad, the doctor says.'

'What is it?'

'Something the matter with my heart or my lungs, or both of 'em. I can't make out exactly what from what the doctor says. Of course, I can't expect him to waste much talk on me for what the parish gives him, and such a lot of us to look after. But he's a kind man, sir, for all that. If he could only cure me so as I could get up, that's as much as I could expect, but I shall never get up again, though he says so, he's a kin'—'

She dropped her work and pressed both her hands on her left breast. Her face and lips turned ashy pale, and the flimsy bed-covering heaved and fell as if a little piston were throbbing up and down beneath it.

‘It’s over now, sir,’ she said, resuming her work. ‘I’m often took like that. Sometimes I feel so faint that I put my hand to my side in a fright and can’t feel a mite o’ beat, and then at other times my heart will begin to thump as if it’d burst my ribs out.’

‘Had not you better give over working for a little? Would not you feel a little easier if I lifted that box off the bed?’

‘No, sir, thankee—I might in my fingers, but I shouldn’t in my mind. I’ll do what I can whilst I last. Look at *them* out there.’

‘But, surely, your husband wouldn’t force you to work, ill as you are?’

'Force me! poor feller. 'Taint him that forces me. Look at my old man, and them poor kids, hard at it from six in the morning to ten at night, except at meals—and they don't last long, or when my old man is carting the things about to the slaughter-houses—and that's harder work than the bench, and more disheartenin'.'

'Slaughter-houses!' I exclaimed, 'I didn't know that your husband made anything for the butchers.'

'The cheap furnitur' shops,' she explained, with a glance of astonishment at my ignorance: 'drapers and the rest of 'em, that grind Englishmen's bones to make their bread. And them bazaars are often just as bad. I used to cart about desks and work-boxes and that like to them, when I could get about, and sometimes have to take less than the stuff had cost, because I must take back some kind

o' money. Look at my poor old man and them poor children,' she added; 'some of 'em's gone first, thank God'—and then she broke down, sobbing.

When she was a little calmed, I said—

'Mrs Paternoster, do you know what your name means?'

I made the remark in a vague hope that I might be able somehow to utilize it for her comfort; but, as is often the case when one tries to use sacred words as a kind of *Abracadabra*, I was at first quite unsuccessful.

'No, sir!' she answered, utterly unable to discover the relevancy of what she plainly thought an unfeelingly trivial question.

'It means "our Father"—it is the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in Latin.'

'Is it, sir? I never knew that before. But what do you mean, sir? I always say

Our Father, and I've taught the children to say it too. That's all the schoolin' they've had—that and the Ten Commandments, and the 'Postles' Creed. If we could spare the money, and God knows we can't, we couldn't spare their help in gettin' it, and so we can't send 'em to school.'

' Well, in your hardest struggles, have not you always had daily bread of some kind—however coarse or scanty ? '

' No, *that* we haven't ! Many and many's the time we've gone without. My poor children ! And what better have they to look to ? Things are getting worse instead of better. If it didn't seem mean to want to get away and leave 'em in it, I should be glad to think I was goin' soon where the other poor things is—but they ain't poor now, thank God. And then there's my poor old man ! '

And again the poor woman began to

sob so bitterly that I grew alarmed.

'He seems a very civil, hard-working man,' I answered, blurting out the first commonplace I could think of at all consolatory.

'Yes, *that* he is,' she sobbed, trying hard to gulp down her sobs, 'and when me and John was courtin', he could hold his head up, and look any man in the face, and give him back his answer. The spirit hadn't been taken out of him by them slaughterers—begging and praying they'd buy what him and the kids and me have been working our fingers off over. He was earning good wages for good work then, and now, if he could get such work again—which he couldn't, try as he might, —I've seen him fit to cry because he couldn't do it. His hand is out, he says, and that must be a sore downcome for a man.'

'Does he make the best use of what you do earn?' I inquired, in the character of moral censor.

'Best use!' answered the wife in scorn. 'He'd be puzzled to make a bad use of it, poor John! If slaving your arms and your legs off, and then going without grub, is wasting your money, that's how John wastes his. He never did drink, but now it's often he don't taste a half-pint of beer from week's end to week's end.'

The poor woman's ardent advocacy of her husband's moral character had brought on palpitation of the heart once more. When I had done the little I could to relieve her, I remained as still as I could in the stifling room—meanwhile watching the wearily persistent industry that was going on, without a smile, almost without a word—except a rare feeble attempt at a 'bit of fun,' or young-sisterly snarl, be-

tween little Jane and little Polly—in the hot outer room, whose atmosphere did not purify that of ours by its many-scented, sluggish overflowings.

Both for the invalid's sake and my own, I tried to open the single small back-window of the inner-room ; but it was immovable. If I could have opened it, however, the air it would have let in might have been even worse than what we were breathing. The grimy window looked out on a tiny, walled-in, ink-black backyard—so far as its colour could be discovered in the midst of its piled-up heaps of ashes and garbage of all kinds, sweltering beneath the smoky sunlight of a grilling East End summer's day.

When Mrs Paternoster could speak once more, I asked her whether her husband had been in what she called ‘good work’ when they were married.

'He'd just lost it, sir, but no fault of his own, and I thought he'd get it again. If I'd known he wouldn't, I wouldn't have drawed back. A girl likes to get married anyhow to the chap she's fond of; and John's been a good husband s'far's ever he could. What he could do, he's done, poor feller. But it's been a hard life. Ah, sir, it's a easy thing for them as are sure of it to talk about praying to God for your daily bread !'

If I had told her that I still believed that God *would* give their daily bread to all who humbly asked Him for it, and did their best to earn it, should I have been telling the truth? Even so, could I have explained to her satisfaction, or my own, how it was that she and hers had often gone without daily bread? Instead, I said,—

'If you *have* been forced to go without

literal daily bread, nothing can rob you of the Bread of Life, if you will only take it.' I was not sure that I should be understood, but the woman's eyes instantly lighted up.

'Ah, sir,' she cried, 'talk to me about Christ—that's why I sent for you. He seems nearer like than God. I read about Him in the Testament, when I've a chance, but that ain't often, and John can't spare time to read to me, and the children can't read. I should like to go of a Sunday to church or chapel or anywherees, just to hear about Him, but we've to work best part of Sunday to get along anyhow, and then in the evenin' John says we hain't clothes fit for church. "Why, John," says I, "you don't mind your rags when you go about week-days." "That don't matter," says he, "'cept that the poorer you looks, the more they screws you down. Let the kids have a breath of air when they

can get it, Molly." And so when it's dusk, we slip out and slink about the streets as if we was ashamed of ourselves, though it's no particular harm we're doin'—it'd be a good thing for the children if they *could* get a breath of fresh air once in a way, but there ain't much o' that where we can get to. I'd rather be in church, if it was only for the quiet and the rest. But there I'm talking as if I was about again, and yet I'm sure I never shall be. John used to be a church-goer, but he's got hardened against the Bible, poor feller, because life's been so hard to him. "Oh, yes," he'll say, in a pet like, "I don't doubt God's good to them as He's made well-off, but what's that to *us*?" But it's different with me. Now my only comfort is to hear about Him as was poor, too, and yet's waiting for poor folks in the happy place he's got ready for 'em.'

‘Yes, think of what He suffered ! ’

‘Ah, *that* He did, or how could any of us have a hope of a better world than this ? And that would be a poor look-out, I expect, for most of us. And yet, sir—’

‘Well, and yet ? ’

‘I’m half afraid to say it. It seems as if I wasn’t thankful to Him for what He’s done. And yet sometimes, when I’m half-choked—specially on a day like this—I can’t help thinking that if He *hadn’t* where to lay his head, He could wander about in the fresh air and pick lilies of the field. And then, if there *was* such lots of bad men set against Him, He’d some—men, and women, and children—that was fonder of Him than anybody’s been fond of anybody before or since.’

““And they all forsook him and fled,” and, patient as He was, He was forced to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?" What loneliness that any one has felt could be like *that*—to *Him*? I don't wonder at your feeling lonely, but at any rate you have your husband and children close to you. You love them, and I have no doubt they love you.'

'Yes, sir, *that* we do, but then you see, sir, people that are driven about from pillar to post like us hain't no time to be *fond* of one another. If you don't get snappish to one another, you get hard somehow. I mustn't talk for a bit—I want quietin'—read me a chapter, please, sir—out of the Revelations.'

The Apocalypse—I am not the first to remark—is the favourite book of believers in the Bible who are worsted in the humblest of life's struggles. *They* find no fault—they find a charm—in its material images: in splendour and purity so utterly beyond the scope of their experience in any

way as to become ideal to *them*. They know nothing of the controversies that have raged, and go on raging, over the Apocalypse's predictions ; the prophecy *they* read in it is one of solace after affliction, of a happy home for ever with Christ for those who sincerely, however ignorantly, wish to do His will.

I opened Mrs Paternoster's Testament, turned over the leaves, and began almost at random at the fourth verse of the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation :--

' And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.'

' Ah, sir, that's beautiful,' said the poor woman faintly, but with a face that shone with joy, as if it had been transfigured. ' I feel as if I could go to sleep now, and

dream I was in heaven; and if I was to wake there, how happy! I feel as if I could lay on my left side again, my heart's going so easy.'

She struggled over on to her left side, and fell asleep; whilst I went out of the room on tiptoe, and told Paternoster that it would be well to let his wife take her rest for some time without disturbance. A useless caution; the next day I learnt that when Paternoster next spoke to his wife he found that she had entered into the rest that can never be broken.

VI.

‘THE SQUARE DOLLYWOMAN.’

In one of the parishes in which I have served, in order to raise a sum of money for parochial purposes, the incumbent, a brother curate, and myself resolved to become systematically sturdy beggars — to divide the parish into three districts, take one each, and make a personal appeal to every householder therein whom we could suppose to have any money, much or little, to spare for charitable purposes.

It was in this way I became acquainted

with Mrs Phipps, who kept the rag-and-bottle and 'dolly' shop in Blackberry Lane. That was a very rural sound, and once upon a time, I suppose, the dark, dirty, built-in thoroughfare so called was a grassy, briar-dotted, bee and butterfly-haunted country lane, winding between meadows fragrant with May and cows' breath ; but anything less country-like than Blackberry Lane is now, and long has been, it would be hard to fancy. And Mrs Phipps's shop is, perhaps, the most unrural feature even where there are so many of them. A rusty gibbet projects from the lintel of the shop-door, and from the end of the gibbet dangles a grinning, goggle-eyed wooden negress, with cataleptic arms and legs, and arrayed in a flaring-bordered night-cap and gown of what was once perhaps white calico. The panes of the shop-window are blinded with bills, announcing, by bloated

red and black figures in their centre, the prices per lb. which the proprietress gives for the very miscellaneous articles in which she deals. These bills are bossed with a coloured cartoon depicting a happy family beaming with delight around a vast, holly-sprigged Christmas pudding, which, the accompanying letter-press informs the passer-by, *Materfamilias* has procured for her ecstatically astonished husband and little ones simply by selling at this ‘emporium’ what she once threw away as rubbish. Against one of the door-posts leans, pasted on a board, what looks like a Royal proclamation. It is headed V. R., with the Royal arms sprawling between the Royal initials. But on examination V. R. turns out to be an integral portion of another of Mrs Phipps’s advertisements, which must thus be read:—‘*We are giving*’ so and so for such and such. The inside of the shop

is a filthy chaos. There is not a single clean thing in it. The few visible portions of the floor, walls, ceiling, &c., are, perhaps, even dirtier than the piled, leaning, and hanging wares, almost literally of all sorts, by which the greater portion of their superficies is hidden. The air is foul with the scent of musty, fusty rags, bedding, and wearing apparel, mildewed boots and shoes, horse collars and traces, rancid kitchen stuff, perspiring candle-ends, putrescent bones, and a mouldy *et-cætera* of seemingly utterly used-up ‘trash.’ Heaps and boxfuls and trayfuls of old metal block the way; fragments of crumpled sheet-lead, short lengths of twisted leaden pipe, pewter measures and trenchers and basins, lidless tin kettles, a battered zinc-pail, copper nails, a crushed copper carboy, brass name-plates, bell-pulls, beer-taps and water-taps, leprous with verdigris, and steel and iron chisels, saws,

hammer-heads, locks, keys, bolts, one-legged tongs, pokers with the bottom off, horse-shoes, donkey-shoes, chain-links, segments of cog-wheels, screws, nails, scraps of hoop, &c., &c., so rusty and dusty that you cannot help fancying they must have lain for a hundred years at the bottom of the sea, and then for another century, undisturbed, in Mrs Phipps's shop. They are *so* rusty that it is hard to believe that any sound metal can be left within the scabby flakes of corrosion that crumble into red powder at the slightest touch.

Glass is supposed to be transparent, or at least translucent, but Mrs Phipps's glass can claim neither attribute: bulbous drug-gists' bottles, with gilt cabalistic characters almost obliterated, and void of the coloured water that once made them look so gay; graduated medicine-bottles, physic-phials, with their labels half scratched off, or still

pasted round their waists, or sloping in a very crumpled condition from their necks; wine bottles, beer bottles, pickle jars; long-necked scent-bottles, with specks of gilding still clinging to their cut bodies; square-built scent-bottles, with Jean Maria Farina's sprawling signature still dimly discernible upon them. That is a curious signature to see in Mrs Phipps's shop—except that its stenches rival those of Cologne. To match the empty druggists' bottles, there is a little colony of empty, banded, white druggists' jars, scrolled with 'Leeches,' 'Tamarinds,' &c. To match the pewter pots, there is a beer-engine, minus one handle, and the china encasements of two of the others. But 'matching' is not, by any means, the strong point in Mrs Phipps's stock. A conscientious inventory-maker for it could very seldom lighten his labour by dittoes. Al-

most smothered in a drift of ropes' ends, stands an old-fashioned chest of drawers, with the veneer chipped off at the corners, and tags of frayed string doing duty for the long-vanished brass handles. All the drawers are crammed with property of the most bewildering variety and infinitesimal value. On the top of the chest of drawers lies an anatomized iron bedstead, and on that lies a bridgeless, stringless, bowless violin; and beside the fiddle stands a domed canary cage, whose brass wires doubtless once gleamed dazzlingly; but now are as thickly furred with black dirt as if it had been hanging for months in an ever-smoking chimney. Mrs Phipps also occasionally deals in a small way in books, pictures, and engravings. It must be *very* occasionally, or else she must get rid of her new purchases very expeditiously. So long as I have known her shop, it has dis-

played the same brown-measled engraving of Napoleon crossing the Alps, at full gallop, over snow which ever-accumulating grime has turned into soot; the same frameless oil paintings of semi-obliterated Nobodies and Nowheres; the same little piles of unreadable books in blue boards, with curly-edged leaves clotted together with smoky dust. It is not a pleasant task to inspect Mrs Phipps's little literary stock. When you open the books, and then shut them with a clap to free them of their dust, it flies out in such a cloud that you are half choked; and as you turn the faded, freckled pages that seem at first to have as much life of any kind in them as a yellow mouldering shroud, you find that they *have* life in them—of a disagreeably crawling kind that makes you drop the volume as you might drop a hot cinder you had unwittingly taken up.

After all, I have only hinted at the ‘infinite variety’ of Mrs Phipps’s wares. Malodorous dirt is the one characteristic common to them all; and Mrs Phipps seemed to me a fit dealer in such wares when I crossed her threshold. She, too, was very dirty. There was a look of cunning also on her fat face that prejudiced me against her. I made up my mind that she had grown fat on the bargains she had screwed out of the poorest of the poor. There was a self-hugging defiance of all considerations that did not affect herself in the way in which she tightened the embrace in which her fat arms held her feather-bed bust, that made it plain I should not get a farthing out of her.

So I thought—but I felt very much ashamed of myself when I had explained my business to Mrs Phipps. She asked sharp questions—so sharp as to imply, or

rather to indicate *sans phrase*, that, at starting, it was an open question with her whether I was or was not 'cadging,' under false pretences, for my own benefit. Her nearest approach to an apology for such an imputation was not very complimentary: 'I'm not blamin' ye, sir. If you can get the money out o' them as are flats enough to give it, why shouldn't ye? Parsons must live, and they've got families to keep like other folks, and most o' the parsons about 'ere, they say, is as poor as church mice. I'm not blamin' ye, sir. It's a shame you should be druv to it—that's all I say. Sich as you does all the work, an' them as does nothin' gits the pay—gits made deacons, an' *harch*-deacons, an' all kind o' *harches*. *Harches!* what right's any parson to be called a *harch*? There ain't one o' them could build a bridge, I'll go bail. I'm not blamin' ye, sir. I pity

you poor parsons about 'ere—that's what I say. Why, I s'pose *you* now, sir—may go on slavin' and cadgin' all your born days, and never git made even so much as a deacon of—let alone the harches.'

I thought it would merely puzzle, and, possibly, still further prejudice, Mrs Phipps if I informed her that, at any rate, I could claim *priest's* orders ; and so I went on with my work of explanation. When at last she *was* satisfied that I was, *bonâ fide*, collecting money for the benefit of her poor neighbours, her contribution to the parochial fund was, in proportion to her means, one of the most liberal we obtained.

After that first interview, brief in spite of the cross-questionings with which she had protracted it, I got to know a good deal more about Mrs Phipps. I found that she was called in the neighbourhood the

'square dolly-woman.' *Round* would have been a far more appropriate adjective so far as figure went, I thought; and one day I asked Mrs Phipps how she had obtained her curious title.

'Why, you see, sir, I *keeps* a dolly—lends money to poor folks on things they couldn't pop at the regular pawns, an' I tries not to be quite so 'ard on 'em as some of the dollies is, and I'm freer-'anded in buyin'. So that's why they calls me *square*, I s'pose. I've to keep my eyes open though, both with them I lends to and them I buys of, or they wouldn't hact on the square with *me*. I've got a name for good natur', and they'd take adwantage of it, if I'd let 'em. I don't mind doin' a kind haction now an' then, but I won't be *done*. If it's kindness, it's kindness ; and if it's business, it's business. I won't be diddled out o' the credit o' doin' a kind

haction, an' made to believe I'm only a-doin' business. When they tries that game on with me, my back's soon up, I can tell ye, sir. Fust time you come to see me, sir, thinks I to myself, "If the poor gen'-leman would only humble hisself to ask me straightforward, I'd give him, willin', what I could for hisself; but if he's too proud to take it that way, I ain't a-goin' to let him think he's gammoned me into believin' it's for the p'rish'ners." That's why I was so short with ye, at fust, sir, till I'd made out the rights of what you'd come about.'

'What kind of things do the poor people pledge?'

'Oh, all sorts—some as I could 'ardly git back the money I lent on 'em for—and that's where they tries to do me.'

'And what do you charge?'

'Why, at most of the dolly shops, sir,

they charge jist the same whether a thing's in a week or whether it's in a day—twopence on the shillin'—that's the charge. But that seems a hawful lot for the poor critturs to pay; so I'll only charge a 'a'penny, say, if the thing's taken out next day, and a penny if it's out by the middle of the week, and so on. It's puzzlin' work makin' reductions when it's only a penny or so you've lent. A ha'penny on the twopence is what the other dollies charge, whether it's for a week or for a day; but if they're people I know, I'll only charge a farden, up to fourpence, and sometimes I won't charge nothin', when they pays back within the week—that's accordin' to circumstances, of course. When folks are honest to my knowledge, and 'ard up and no mistake about it, it would go agin my conscience not to let 'em 'ave a few coppers now and then—'

long as they don't want to cheat me. If they'll leave what's worth the money they want, I'll let honest folks have it, though that ain't the way of the trade, for you may 'ave a thing as *was* jist worth the money 'anging on 'and till it ain't worth *'alf*, let alone the interest. And sometimes I'll lend, when I know the poor critturs can't spare what they've brought even for a day, without takin' the thing in—rugs and sich, when it's bitter cold.* But they mustn't try to do me—make out that things I couldn't make no money out of is worth ten times as much as they want on 'em. Soon's ever I see they wants to do me, my back's up. "There," says I, and I gives 'em back their trumpery, "we won't 'ave

* 'And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: in any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee.' (Deut. xxiv. 12, 13.)

no words. You can walk, soon's ever you please." And they do walk pretty brisk, but, bless you, some on 'em will try on the same game agin till I git right out o' patience with 'em. My temper's short, and I don't see why they should want to do me jest becos I've got more pity for 'em than most has.'

'What are the sums you generally lend ?'

'Oh, twopences, and threepences, and fourpences, and sixpences, and so on up to a shillin'. 'Tain't often that I go beyond the bob. Sometimes it's 'alf-a-crown, but that's seldom. Seven and sixpence is the most I ever lent to any one at one time, and that was only once in my life.'

'But I suppose you have been asked for more ?'

'Well, sir, you see the things that is

mostly left with me is sich common stuff that the most owdacious of them as wants to borer on 'em wouldn't think of arskin' anythin' like that. And yet I *have* been arsked for out-of-the-way lots, too. Look at this flute now.'

She opened a drawer in the counter and took out of it a faded green-baize flute-case, and out of that the joints of a German flute, which when put together looked so very poor an instrument that I wondered any one should have thought it worth while to provide it with a case.

'Look at that now. I don't know whether you're a judge of sich things, but I've shown it to them as is, or shams to be, and they say it 'ud be dear at any money. And that's about my own opinion, though it wouldn't do for me to say so to everybody, if I ever want to sell it, which I don't mean to yet.'

'I suppose there's some history connected with the flute that has interested you.'

'Yes, there is, sir—though it's precious little I know about it. Though if you come to that, everything that's brought to me has a 'ist'ry as you call it, that must be hinterestin' to somebody. But about this flute. I was settin' in the shop as I might be now, when in there comes a tall, thin chap that didn't look jest the sort I'm used to. He was seedy enough, poor feller, but still there was a look about him that made me think he'd been used to somethin' a bit better sometime or other. He was dressed in black—coat an' trousers both—leastways they *had* been black when his hair was. His hair and his clothes looked 's if they'd grown grey together. Well, sir, he pulls this baize thing out of his pocket

as carefully as if it was the preciousest thing in the world, and looks over his shoulder, and then he puts it down on the counter without ever sayin' a word. I'd begun to pity the man, but then I thought it was plate he'd been a-priggin'. "No, no, my man," says I, "this ain't your shop. I ain't a fence, and if you don't slope precious quick, I'll send for the pollis to sarve you out for your imperence in bringin' a bad name on me, which I've never desarved none." He looks up astonished like, and then he puts his flute together, and give it me, and says, "Will you lend me a pound on this, ma'am?" I looks at it, and then I looks at him, and says I, I says, "I'd see you furder fust. Why, man, it's cracked, and you must be cracked, too, to think of sich a thing." I couldn't 'elp pityin' him agin —he looked so wexed—for the flute like he

seemed to care more than he did for himself. It was easy to see that *he* vallied it at no end o' price, some reason or other, and forgot, poor crittur, that it worn't the same to everybody else it were to him.

"My good man," says I, "if you want to make money out of your flute, you'd better sell it. I'll buy it if you're anyways reasonable, but you must put a price upon it. I can't be buyer and seller both."

"No, ma'am," says he, "I can't sell it," and then he goes on moonin' to hisself—"all gone, all gone but that—nothing left *they* ever saw but that. I can't sell my last thing that ever had sunshine on it." I thought the poor man was wandering; so to bring him to hisself, I says, "Why, there's the sun a-shinin' on your coat now, sir. If you won't name a price, I'll bid 'alf-a-crown for

your flute, though, mind you, 'alf o' that is only out o' charity." "I thank you, ma'am," says he, civil and yet proud like, "but I did not ask for charity. I cannot sell my flute. Will you lend me," he goes on, droppin' humble agin, "sixpence on it?" "That I will," says I, "or a shillin', if you like." "No, ma'am," says he, "I fear that would not be fair to you. I forgot that the flute could not be to you what it is to me. I shall be able to pay sixpence sooner than I could pay a shilling, and so I shall get my flute back the sooner." He give a little smile when he said that, but if he'd made a joke, I couldn't see it, poor feller. Then he unscrewed his flute, and put the j'ints back into the green case, lingerin' over 'em jest as if they was his babbies he was buryin'. "You will please to take great care of this, ma'am, and not

let any one tamper with it," says he when he give it me, as solemn as if he was trustin' me with a fortun'. Thinks I, "Who'd want to, and if they did, what 'ud it matter?" But I says to him, as grave as I could, "All right, sir—I'll look after that." But that poor gen'leman, he looked so down in the mouth when he went out o' the door, that I couldn't 'elp callin' after him, "Hi, stop a bit, sir,—you can take your flute, and I'll trust to your word to pay me." I'm *sure* he heared me, for he give a twitch in his shoulders, as if he was a-comin' back, but he made believe not to hear me, and went on, and I've never seed him since. That's more than three years ago, but even if I could git a customer for his flute—and at any rate, I could git more than a tanner for it—I wouldn't sell it. I'll keep it 's long as I

can, to give the poor gen'leman a chance
of gittin' it agin, if he does come back—
he seemed so cut up at partin' with it. If
that's all the 'appiness he's got in the world,
it would be a 'ard thing to rob him of it.'

VII.

‘OLE PIPPIN.’

I WAS one day in Mrs Phipps’s shop, when a hale-looking old man came in to dispose of a bagful of metallic odds and ends. He was a cheery old fellow, with full ruddy cheeks, and almost silvery hair; but he had a habit of casting his eyes down and prying about whilst he was talking that made me suspicious of him at first; when, however, I did catch sight of his clear blue eyes, there was such an honest look in them that I felt I must have

made a mistake in his case as well as Mrs Phipps's in my first reading of character. We often do make such mistakes when we trust solely to conventionally accepted symptoms of dishonesty. Almost every calling engenders some trick of manner which may possibly admit of an unfavourable interpretation, if the observer rigidly applies to it his abstract notions of the way in which all kinds of people ought to behave. Persons who pride themselves upon their knowledge in the matter of insight into character—their ability, as they phrase it, to 'take stock of a fellow at first sight,' are often ludicrously self-misled. Witness the false scents which detectives who have brought themselves to believe that everybody is a more or less cunning rogue often run off upon, with a comically earnest certainty that they are at the heels of the rascal who is 'wanted.' They hunt

in London, whilst he is half way across the Atlantic. They rush to take the Cunard boat at Liverpool, and possibly brush against the man they are in quest of in the Strand, whilst they are entering the Hansom they have hailed in a hurry to convey them at a gallop to Euston Square, merely ‘confounding’ their quarry for getting in their way. The old man’s habit of casting down his eyes, I soon found, was one of these trade-caused tricks of manner—as innocent as the soberest sailor’s roll on shore.

‘Who is he, Mrs Phipps?’ I asked when the old man had gone out with the money she had paid him for his metal.

‘Oh! that’s ole Pippin, sir.’

‘And what is Mr Pippin’s business?’

The title I had given him greatly tickled Mrs Phipps. When she had finished laughing, she answered, ‘Bless you, sir, he ain’t *Mr* Pippin’ (bursting out in laugh-

ter again at the title she had emphasized). ‘Pippin ain’t his name—surname or Chris’n name. It’s the name he goes by. I can’t rightly say what his real name is. Though if you’d mind the neighbours, you’d say I’d ought to. Accordin’ to them, me and ole Pippin’s goin’ to make a match of it. A likely thing, and him old enough to be my father! Though he’s a fine ole chap, ain’t he, sir, for his years? And he don’t do badly neither. He ain’t like the rest o’ them shore-workers—a haul to-day, drunk as a sow to-morrer, and not a penny in their pockets day after. He’s a righter notion o’ the vally o’ money than *that*, and he makes a sight, they say; but then he’s burdened hisself with sich a lot to spend it on that I might as well marry a viddiver as wanted somebody to ’elp keep a lot o’ kids, as ole Pippin; an’ that oodn’t suit my book, let alone his years, though no

one can deny he carries 'em better than lots as ain't 'alf his age. I've got on a deal better since my fust ole man died than ever I did while he was livin', so I ain't a-goin to git another, 'cept I can better myself. What I make now I *have*, and can do as I like with; but law, it's foolish nonsense talkin' like that. Ole Pippin's a deal too much sense to think o' sich a thing.'

At that time I did not know what 'shore-worker' meant, and so I had to ask for an explanation, which was thus given:—

'Them as goes grubbin' in the shores, when the tide will let 'em in, pickin' up whatever they can get 'old on. It seems a queer life, don't it, sir? P'r'aps there's some on 'em routin' about under our feet now, jest like the rats. And the rats is wery dangerous, too, at times, down there, I've heared. It's a queer life, but there's

money to be made at it, if the silly fellers had only the wit to keep it. All kind o' things—shillin's an' gold, too—they find in that filthy muck. But if you want to 'ear about that, you should go an' 'ave a talk with ole Pippin. There ain't many's been at it longer than he 'ave, an' he's a pleasant ole feller to talk to, an' don't by any means objec' to the sound of his own woice.'

I was then comparatively unfamiliar with the strange variety of modes in which the inhabitants of this huge city pick up a living. The information that there was a class of men who earned what, but for their folly, would be a good living by groping about in the foul darkness of the London sewers excited my curiosity ; and I willingly availed myself of Mrs Phipps's offer to make me acquainted with old Pippin.

In spite of his vagabondish calling and our common friend's little sneer at his loquacity, I found him to be an old man deserving of respect in more ways than one; and I think therefore that a brief account of his life and adventures may interest my readers.

I should premise that at the time of which I write the scientific modern system of metropolitan drainage was only dreamt of: a gigantic system which would be cheap even at its gigantic cost—if only, after having taken so much pains to purify one part of our river, we were not satisfied with defiling it a little lower down; if after having collected our sewage so that it *could* be utilized, we still did *not* utilize it, except in an infinitesimal degree—still treating as rubbish to be got rid of anyhow what might be made to produce wealth in comparison with which the richest hauls

the old shore-workers ever fished out of the filthy flood would be trifles not worth counting.

Old Pippin's real name I found to be Frederick Smith. Why he was called Pippin he could not tell me—except that most in his line went by a 'by-name ;' he had gone by his so long that when I used his real name he seemed uncertain whether he was the person addressed. I found him in occupation of two ground-floor rooms. Neither the rooms nor the locality in which they were situated would have suggested the idea that the tenant made, in Mrs Phipps's phrase, 'a sight o' money,' but old Pippin's rooms were exceptionally good in such a quarter, and still more exceptionally furnished. There was no lack of anything necessary for his large adopted family, but the place was in a sad muddle. His housekeeper was his niece,

a good-looking but rather sour-looking widow of two or three and thirty, with a swarm of children. The youngsters, I could see, tyrannized over their good-natured grand-uncle, but they were also very fond of him. The mother likewise tyrannized over the old man, but she did *not* seem at all fond of him. On the other hand, she seemed to cherish a chronic grudge against him. She was plainly angry that a stranger should see how fond her children were—in spite of their teasing ways—of the old man who supported her and them. She interrupted our chat as often as she durst with hints about the tide, and muttered soliloquies *at* her uncle for dawdling at home instead of being at work. She tried to enlist my sympathies by insinuating that her uncle had done her some irreparably grievous wrong, but when she found that I reserved my pity for the

old fellow who bore her ingratitude so cheerfully, she went off in a huff; and I was by no means sorry to be left to continue my talk with old Pippin without further interruption than recurrent inrushings of the noisy children. I learnt the exact nature of old Pippin's relations to his niece, soon after she had flounced out to gossip in the court (banging the door after her, boxing the ears of one of her little boys for letting it jam his fingers, and then putting her angry face into the room again to make her uncle responsible, in some incomprehensible manner, for the poor little fellow's bellowing). But I will give old Pippin's history as concisely as I can *ab ovo*.

Nearly eighty years before the time in which I had my first talk with him, he had been born in Limehouse. His father was a lighterman, and as soon as Fred could

run alone he was almost all day long on, or in, or on the shore of, the water. ‘I should feel lost, sir,’ he said, in reply to an inquiry whether he could not find some employment more suitable for his advanced age, ‘if I was put anywheres where I couldn’t see the river.’ As soon as his little brother Jack, who was two years younger, could splash about with Fred, he was left almost entirely to Fred’s care. ‘It was a queer way to bring up children, but I liked it. Jack didn’t. He was always weakly, poor chap, an’ that made him peevish. Many a lickin’ I’ve got takin’ his part. I could ha’ got on with the other boys, but poor Jack had a way of rilin’ ‘em, and then he’d come running to me.’

When the boys were seven and five both their parents died. ‘I don’t like to speak ill of my own father and mother, but ’tworn’t much they’d ever done for us.

'Cept that we'd to sleep where we could, their bein' dead didn't make much odds to us. We'd begun to pick up such a livin' as we could before they was dead, and so we'd only to go on doin' it when they *was* dead. It was a bad thing for two boys to be left to theirselves like that. I'm afraid we should ha' gone to the bad, if it hadn't been for an old woman we often come across down by the river. It worn't anything she could do for us in the way of food and that, for she'd to work hard for her own livin', poor old gal, and it worn't much of a one when she'd got it. But she'd give us a stitch now and then, and what's better, she tried to mend our manners for us. Of a Sunday evenin' she'd have us into her room, and tell us about what was good. It worn't much she knowed, perhaps, poor old gal, but what she did, she acted up to. You never heard her say a

bad word, and she was the forgivin'est old creatur' I ever come across. The boys would tease her, and them as were old enough to know better were downright cruel to her sometimes ; but she never bore 'em a grudge, and was as ready to do a good turn to them as she was to anybody else. She was such a cheery old bird, too. If anybody had a right to growl, she had, you might say ; for she hadn't a soul in the world to look after her, and she was often ailing ; and when she was about, she could never do much more than just make enough to keep soul and body together ; but, catch Molly grumblin' ! "I've got a friend up there," she'd use to say, pointin' to the sky ; "and if things *is* a bit hard, I shall enjoy heaven all the more, when I get to it. My friend's gone afore to prepare a place for me—them's his own words." I declare one evening when I went round to

her place, and heard the poor old woman was dead and buried, I was a deal more cut up than I was when my own mother died. That must be seventy years ago and more, and yet I remember it as if it was yesterday. It was a Sunday evening. The bells was ringing, and the sun was shinin' on the river and the ships, and poor Jack was in the workhouse. He'd never been bad enough to be took in before. I felt lonely somehow, and thought I'd go round and have a chat with Molly, and there, when I got there, she was dead, you see. I've reason to remember her, for if it hadn't been for her, I might never ha' had the happy life I have. It was through her I got into the right way o' lookin' at things. And what she'd told me stuck to me somehow. I don't say I never did wrong—there ain't many can say that, I fancy. But I was ashamed of myself afterwards—I

couldn't take a pride in it as some poor fellers does. And now for many a year I've felt that I've got a friend up there, too. It's a pleasant thing to think of when you're grubbin' about in the dark. Sayin' a prayer to yourself's better than swearin' down there.'

When Jack was discharged from the infirmary, the parish found employment for him as a shopkeeper's errand-boy, whilst Fred continued to pick up his crust anyhow on the river's bank. I gathered from the old man's hurt tone that at this time the better-fed and better-clad Jack grew ashamed of his ragged elder brother. 'But, of course,' added the old man in excuse, 'it wouldn't ha' done for Jack to ha' kept much company with me then. His master would ha' thought that he was robbin' the till, and me a-helpin' him.'

After a time Fred made the acquaint-

ance of some of the ‘toshers’—men who hunt for ‘marine stores,’ old metal, &c., in the river’s mud, turn over builders’ dry rubbish, and used, at any rate, to explore the sewers, in search of the same, and any more literal valuables that may be buried in such apparently unlikely places. He soon became a proficient in the strange calling, and had followed it with more or less success ever since—much to the benefit of his brother and his family. Jack had married young, and soon had a great many children, with very small means of keeping them. Old Pippin had almost supported them whilst they were children, and had often had to help them after their marriage. His youngest niece, on her mother’s death, had come back to her father’s to keep his house. She was a widow, and had brought a brood of children with her. When her father died, old

Pippin had ‘set up housekeeping,’ as he phrased it, in order to give his niece and her family a home. When I hinted that, considering the obligations under which she lay to him, I thought that she might be a little more gracious in her manner to him, he answered with a laugh, ‘Ah, well, poor gal, her temper’s short, there’s no denyin’—but then, you see, sir, she’s got it into her head that it’s my fault that she’s a widdy. She says that she could ha’ done a deal better for herself if it hadn’t been for me.’

‘But what nonsense!’

‘Well, no, sir, in a sort o’ way there’s some truth in it—anyhow about her bein’ a widdy. It was me as got her to marry her husband. Leastways I talked to her parents. And a very worthy young man he was, though he did die at a ill-convenient time. *He* couldn’t help that, poor feller! You see there was another chap

that was after her, that didn't mean no good. But he give himself airs as if he was a gen'leman, and she liked him best because of his fine clothes, and he could make her believe anything he liked, poor lass. So I spoke to Jack, and got her married to the t'other to keep her out o' harm's way. I meant well, but she don't seem to see it—and 'tis tryin', no doubt, to a fine young woman like her to be left as she is with such a lot of kids as is pretty sure to scare off any other man from makin' up to her—but the little uns are a great comfort to me, poor dears—I should miss 'em, if they was took away from me.'

Old Pippin made very light of the disagreeables of his subterranean rambles. When I asked him how he could stand the malodour, he answered, 'Oh, I don't mind it a bit—I don't take no notice of it 'cept where it's special strong—and not then

much if I takes a pipe. Some says the air in the shores is strengthenin'. I s'pose that's nonsense, but anyhow it ain't weakenin'. Look at me. I don't look much like a in-walid, do I, sir? And I've been up the shores, as often as the tides 'ud serve, ever since I was fifteen. If poor Jack had taken to the shores, instead of stickin' in a shop, he might ha' been alive and hearty now. Of course, there's foul air in places, as there is in the mines, that 'll put your light out and choke a man in no time. It's a dangerous life—I'm not denyin' that. When you can get through the muck, you don't mind a bit about it—you're thinking of what you'll fish out of it. But there's holes full of slush that 'd take you in over head and ears twice over. And if you don't look sharp, the tide may come in and drownd ye, or the flushers may open a sluice close by, and so again

you'd get drownded. Of course, they couldn't be expected to shout out, "By your leave," even if they knew we was there. We're looked on as a kind o' antelopers, though I can't see there's any harm we do—pickin' up what nobody would get if we didn't grub after it. Of course the people the money we pick up now and then belonged to would like to have it back, but who could find 'em out? So who's a better right to it than us as wenturs our lives for it? 'Tain't half as much as people make out. And it's good we do in searchin' after it—we help clean the shores, and pay ourselves. It's an honest life, ours is. The wonder to me is how any one as hasn't the fear of God before his eyes can take to it. Besides what I've told you, sir, there's places so rotten that if you was to touch a brick, you'd have a cart-load down on ye, and there's places so

narrer, that if you wentur up too far you may get stuck in 'em, and if a new hand gets away from his mates—and old hands, too, in places they ain't up to—they may just wander on till they drops down dead, or the rats tackles them. The rats is wery wicious if you corners 'em. They *do* say there's wild pigs almost as big as bears in some shores. I don't know about that. Anyways, I never come across none, or anybody as had. But there's no doubt about the rats. They've pulled men down, and worried 'em, and picked their bones as clean as a washed plate. The rats nearly did for me once. I'd heard a lot of 'em scuttling up before me, but I didn't care about that. They must be uncommon sharp-set to tackle a man, if they can get away from him. I didn't know that I'd got into what we call a dead-ender—that's a shore with a dead wall at the end of it—a

kind of no admission, you understand, sir, except on business, and not much of that, for when you do get into 'em you'll find the muck dangling from the roofs like candles in a chandler's shop. All of a sudden, the warmin turned and came at me—scores of 'em—hundreds of 'em, I expect. I backed as fast as ever I could, and hit out with my hoe as well as I could, but the roof was so low I couldn't get a fair swing. Thankful enough, I can tell you, sir, I was when I got back to the main, and felt the rats rushing up and down it between my legs, without offerin' to bite me. I should like to die in my bed, and be buried like a Christian. And I thank God there seems a chance of it. It ain't likely anything will happen to me in the shores now, after what might ha' happened, and hasn't happened. After all, though, it don't matter much. If you believe in Him as has given

you a chance o' gettin' there, you can go as straight to heaven out o' the shores as you could off your own bed. That's often been a quietin' thought to me when I've been in a fix.'

VIII.

A DOCK-LABOURER'S HISTORY.

I WILL give one more sketch of river-side life—an account of one of the many casual dock-labourers with whom I have been acquainted. There is no type of character or costume common to this class of people. Their destitution is the only thing they have in common. Those whom misfortune, sickness, improvidence, vice, or crime has left penniless and friendless, but who have still the will, and fancy at least they still have the strength, for hard

work that requires neither skill nor recommendation, muster about the dock-gates to fight for a chance of getting less than a groat an hour, as sparrows in hard frost fight for thrown-out crumbs in a back-yard.

One day I was making the round of visits I had down on my list for the day. I was bidding good-bye to a poor bed-ridden woman, who lay all day long in an almost dark cupboard, dependent on the rough charity of her fellow-lodgers for any kindness or company until her weary daughter came home from work at night. This poor woman was singularly patient, not with the sullen patience which many sufferers have been hardened into, but with a patience which sprang from a genuinely submissive spirit. She thought little of herself, and bowed herself humbly, even cheerfully, to the will of God. I felt

that it was presumption for me even to profess to teach Christianity to her. When I was with her I had to learn—to see the truths I talked about acted upon in unmistakable earnest. And yet I could not help lingering with this poor woman. It was such a change for her to have any one who could stay for a few minutes beside her lonely bed—such a joy to her to have any one with whom she could talk about Him who was her support and solace, and then (even in visiting the sick in the East-End clerical vanity survives) the personal reception this poor woman gave me was so different from what I got from a great many of those I visited, that I gave her, the demands upon it being considered, a disproportionate share of my time. On the occasion I speak of I was bidding her good-bye, at last, in a hurry, when she said,—

'Couldn't you spare time, sir, to see those poor people up-stairs?'

'What poor people?' I asked, thinking that her mind was wandering. I knew, not only of no poor people, but of no room, above her. I was under the impression that when I had reached her closet I had mounted to the 'top of the house.'

'The Searses, sir—haven't you heard of them? The poor woman was in just before you came—half beside herself.'

'But is it a matter I must attend to to-day? I have more than half my calls to make yet.'

'She says they haven't a friend in the wide world to help them, and she's afraid her husband will make away with himself. He can't get anything to do, and she can't get anything to do, and they've ever so many children.'

'Well, I'll go and see them; but which

way must I get up to them ?'

' Turn to your right, sir, instead of going down-stairs, and you'll find the ladder—about at the back of my bed.'

I obeyed her instructions, groping about in the dusk—dusk though it was noon-time—of the top-landing, and mounting the short ladder, found the Searses in their strange upper chamber. They *had* a roof to cover them, and when that is said, all is said that can be said as to the homeliness of their home. There was no lack of light or ventilation in their cock-loft, since several of the tiles had fallen from the roof. Between that dilapidated roof and the joists above the ceiling of the room beneath, Sears and his wife and a large family of small children were cooped. The poor whining youngsters were far less than half-clad in the most scarecrow collection of odds and ends that I had ever

seen. One little girl had only a chemise on—a chemise made out of an old coal-sack, with holes cut in the sides for the arms, and in the bottom, changed into the top, for her poor lathy little neck. A boy's ragged jacket, inverted and buttoned up behind, prematurely supplied another pinched baby with a 'skeleton-suit.' The sleeves were turned back at the 'wrist' to enable the poor little toes to find a way out from those queer trousers. Mrs Sears's scanty cotton gown, through wear and many washings, first brought back to the patternless hue of unbleached calico—a colour which much subsequent dirt had deepened into that of mud—hung so limply about her that it was plain she had no underclothing. Her face, if clean and plumped out, and if her unkempt hair had been neatly ringleted around it, would have been dollishly pretty. As it was, it

looked like a doll's face melted and scratched away into a doll's death's-head. Sears's black-muzzled face, peering out from a shock of matted black hair, was as wasted as his wife's, but it had a far fiercer despair in it. He looked as if, had he been strong enough, he would have murdered me for intruding upon him.

I told him that I had come to make inquiries about him and his family.

'*Inquiries!*' he howled in scorn. 'Can't you see for yourself? If you haven't brought food, be off with ye.'

'Oh, don't talk like that, Tom. Don't mind him, sir—he don't mean it,' cried the poor little woman, in a piteous fright lest I should take offence and leave them to their fate. 'My children are starving, and so 'm I, and so 's he, poor fellow, or he wouldn't talk like that.'

I found that all they had had that

week—and it was drawing to its close—was the two or three loaves the parish had granted them at the beginning of the week.

As they were plainly famished, I gave the man a trifle to buy some bread. As soon as he saw my hand move towards my pocket, he sprang from the rough floor on which he had been grovelling, and stood over me with a menacing look, as if he would tear my heart out if I did not give him enough. He pounced upon the first coin I brought out, darted from the room, and dashed at a headlong pace down the staircase. The soles were almost falling from his boots, and a dreary flap-flap-flapping they made upon the stairs. Presently he came back panting like a dog. He shook all over. The exertion he had taken had so overcome him, that if I had not caught him, he would have fallen to the floor. When I laid hold of him, he clutched

his loaves and glared at me as if he thought I meant to rob him of his bread. As soon as he was seated, he tore it into portions for his wife and children, and then fastened on his own crust. It was horrid to watch those poor creatures worrying their food. Except that the man had served the others before himself, and the woman had given her youngest child a bit of the piece she got before she began to eat, they might have been so many wolves. As it happened, I had never before seen poor starving creatures just come into possession of food. I turned away, and looked out through one of the holes in the roof upon a wilderness of tiles and chimneys until that terrible ‘family meal’ was over.

I began then to make inquiries. To begin with, I asked Sears whether being out in search for work would not be better than nursing his despair at home.

'Haven't I been?' he retorted fiercely, with many epithets, which I need not repeat. 'Wasn't I down at the Docks this morning? And wasn't I turned away, with hundreds more, because this horrid east wind keeps on blowing, just to keep the ships out? I'm not afraid of work. Why don't you give me some, instead of talking about it? Whatever it is, I'll do it. I've worked, and she's worked, poor thing, whenever we could get work to do. Where can I get work now except at the Docks? and this beastly wind has done me out of the chance of that. I'm a likely-looking fellow for any one to hire, ain't I? *You'd* rig me out and be my reference, *wouldn't* you? And what's *she* to do—unless you want her to walk the streets? And that would be no use either; and yet she was a smart pretty lass once, poor thing!' And the man, as he said it, burst

into a laugh, half of mockery, half of remorseful pity, all of utter misery, and clutched at the breast of his tattered, napless, greasy frock-coat with such violence that the string which supplied the place of buttons broke, and I saw that, as I suspected, he was shirtless.

It was not easily that I gained Sears's confidence. His heart was sore, and at war with all the world. If I took out my watch when I visited him, he looked as if I had insulted him. He seemed to think that I did him an injury in merely possessing a watch whilst he had none. At last, however, partly from him, and more from his poor little wife, I learnt something of their history, and, adding my own impressions, may put it together thus :—

Sears was the son of a small but tolerably thriving grocer and tea-dealer in a country town. He was placed at its free

grammar-school, and proved himself a clever boy. So long as he was stimulated by novelty and vanity, he would work, but when the work became mere humdrum routine, he took no further interest in it. He was a flighty lad, and always getting into scrapes. When he left school his father wished to apprentice him to himself, but young Sears had a soul above a grocer's apron. He wanted to be a 'lawyer.' His father could not afford to article him, but he made interest with the attorney who managed such little law business as old Sears had to put into his hands, and the attorney, having heard that young Sears was a sharp lad, consented to take him into his office as a paid clerk, obscurely hinting that if he made himself useful, he might, perhaps, eventually get his articles given him. A month of copying and errand-running, however, disgusted Sears

with the ‘law.’ Two or three other lines of life were tried for him at his own request, but time after time he came back upon his father’s hands; grudging any work his father wished him to do at home, and yet feeling grievously injured if his father would not give him all the pocket-money he wanted. When his father refused him money, his mother was weak enough to supply him with it on the sly. He had grown up into a handsome hobbydehoy, dawdling about in a small country town, and fancying that he had ‘gentlemanly tastes,’ because he disliked regular work, and, without doing any, could somehow get comfortable food and drink, and tolerably smart clothes with a little money in their pockets. He soon found such a life as that ‘slow,’ and to escape from its *ennui*, plunged, or rather paddled, into the still duller dissipation within his reach. Per-

haps it was no very great harm he did at first, but character is soon lost in a small country town, where no ill deed can be hid, every ill deed is magnified, and deeds that admit of two interpretations are sure to be construed in the less charitable sense. Having obtained, however, the reputation of a 'scamp,' young Sears proceeded to justify it ; and to escape the consequences of his *escapade*, he ran away to London, hurried to Charles Street, Westminster, and enlisted in a Lancer regiment. He chose the cavalry because he thought it the most dashing arm of the service, but when he had been sworn in and sent to his dépôt, he found that cavalry soldiers had a good many more disagreeable duties to perform than riding out in full regimentals, with their band braying and clashing and thumping in the van, and crowds of smiling women and children gaping admira-

tion on either flank—than clanking their spurs in undress uniform on the pavements in the evening, with the air of heroes who have just saved their country, and confidently expect their non-militant countrymen's abject worship and their countrywomen's proudly affectionate gratitude. For one thing, Sears found that he had to be taught to ride, and the bullying and the chaff he received in the riding-school hurt him more even than the frequent falls he got there. And then—especially since he was not yet privileged to ride the horses, in public, when they *were* groomed—he loathed the ‘stable-call’ that rang with such taunting menace—‘for if you don’t do it, the Colonel shall hear-r-r’—through the morning air. He had not enlisted in the cavalry that he might get up at unseasonable hours to currycomb biting horses, and wheel about barrow-loads of dung, in a dirty

shirt, with braces dangling over dusty blue trousers that would give him a longer spell of brushing, to make them look decent, than he had to give his horses. He very soon wrote a penitent letter to his father, entreating him to buy him out. But the old man was annoyed by the disgrace which his son had brought upon him, and sternly refused. He was half inclined not to let his wife visit her son, but at last permitted her to do so. When, however, she came back in tears, he was as obdurate as ever. She tried to move him to pity by telling him that she had found her Tom on his knees at the barracks, scrubbing floors like a slavey ; but the old man only answered that it was a good thing anybody could make Tom do anything anyhow useful. Accordingly young Sears was drafted off to the head-quarters of his regiment at the Cape, and for some months his family heard

nothing of him. But he turned up again at home pretty speedily—discharged from the service, according to his own statement, on account of an accident he had met with. By this time the old man had softened towards his son, and the mother and sisters were very proud to welcome home their sun-burnt ‘warrior’ from foreign parts. At any rate, he had *seen* ‘wild Caffres.’ He recommenced his dawdling life, and though his character was really rather worse instead of better, he was at first regarded with rather more respect by his townsfolk as being one who had ‘seen the world.’ Whilst he was leading this idle life he fell in love with a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired little dressmaker, who listened to him as Desdemona listened to Othello, and, since she had, for a wonder, decision of character enough to insist upon marriage, he married her clandestinely. His father

was very angry when he discovered the marriage, but was persuaded by his wife to buy a small tobacconist's business in London for his son. He soon failed in that. His father put him into other small businesses—a musical-instrument shop, a news-vendor's, &c.—but he managed somehow to fail in all. At last the old man's patience was exhausted. In reply to a hundredth appeal for help—for all this time little ones had been coming as fast as they could come—he sent his son a £5 note, and told him that that was the last money he would ever have from home—that he had already had far more than was just to his sisters. Nevertheless, of course, the mother did send money after that; but that source of supply was soon dried up, and Sears found himself with a large family and nothing to keep them and himself upon. No doubt he was quite sincere when he told me that

he would do any work—a poor fellow who cannot even get dock-work is not likely to be very fastidious—but I could plainly see that his ‘pride’ (to use a very absurd conventional phrase), foolishly encouraged by his fondly admiring little wife, had made him turn up his nose at chances of what he called ‘menial’ work which, if he had secured it, would have enabled him to earn some kind of a living, at any rate. Though he still called such work ‘menial,’ and thought he had been shamefully used in not having had the refusal of better employment offered him, he cursed his folly in having despised such work until it was too late for him to get it, however eagerly he might covet it.

When the mother’s supplies ceased, Sears had to sell furniture and clothes to keep his family a little while longer afloat. Whilst he had still a ‘respectable’ suit of

clothes he got a few odd jobs of work which he did not consider menial—receiving for them less than a quarter of the pay menial work for the same time would have brought him in. His wife did a little at her old trade, but the little suddenly became less and then became nothing. She soon had no clothes fit to seek customers in, and had come to live amongst people who had no money to spend on dress-making—who thought themselves lucky if they could make the rags they had still hold together anyhow. In his first sermon on the Lord's Prayer Mr Maurice remarks, 'As the mere legal, formal, distinctions of caste become less marked, how apt are men to indemnify themselves for that loss by drawing lines of their own as deep, and more arbitrary!' There is no section of our complex English society which that acute remark might not

cause to flinch. Old families look down upon families of recent creation. Sons of men who have gained wealth and titles through commerce, speak with ludicrous horror of the defilement caused by ‘twade.’ The wholesale dealer looks upon a shop-keeper as a being with whom, except as a customer, he cannot possibly have any connection. The druggist’s wife loftily ignores the baker’s wife (although, perhaps, they went to school together), and the flour-powdered baker considers the butcher ‘a greasy, vulgar feller.’ In any claimant of intrinsic superiority founded on accidental circumstances, such airs would seem ridiculous—if they were not so awfully unchristian. As Mr Maurice points out, how can such people say, in sincerity, ‘*Our Father?*’ And who, in his human phase, was the Saviour in whom these despisers of their brethren would fain hope they

have interest enough, when they are on their death-beds, to get them into heaven? A carpenter's apprentice who afterwards had not where to lay his head, who lived on alms, and died a convict's death.

The unchristianity of social exclusiveness is so glaring that one hardly likes to laugh at its absurdity, and yet sometimes it *is* very amusing. I once heard a man without education, manners, wit, or even money, who, nevertheless, prided himself on being descended from a long traceable line of humdrum ancestors who had never done anything for the world except perpetuate their very uninteresting family, gravely state that although he charitably hoped that 'common people' *might* get to heaven, he could *not* believe that he should be obliged to mix with them there. He seemed to think that he, so to speak, would be ceremoniously shown into a celestial

family-pew, whilst any common people who managed to enter heaven would have to slink into the free seats. Perhaps even more amusing than such folly as this is the *hauteur* with which people of the lower middle class look down on 'mere working men,' though they, or their fathers, may have been mere working men, and really better off as such than as small shopkeepers. To have to work so many hours a-day for a master degrades a man in the eyes of these social judges, and to have to 'sink' to such a position afflicts them as much as an 'aristocrat' would be afflicted if compelled to wait behind the counter of a shop, and run out, bare-headed, cringing, smirking, and 'washing his hands with invisible soap,' to 'carriage customers.'

It was not, therefore, until starvation absolutely stared him in the face that Sears in desperation tried the Docks. He thought

that, having stooped to such a degradation, he was sure of work, but he found himself terribly mistaken. Many a time after shouting himself hoarse, and getting squeezed black and blue, in his efforts to attract the attention of the calling foreman, he had found himself still unhired. When there was the slightest chance of fresh hands being needed in the course of the day, he lingered on in or about the Docks until pay time came, in a faint hope of earning a few pence by a sudden job. At other times, as on the occasion on which I made his acquaintance, he returned to his wretched 'home' to madden himself by the sight of those for whom he felt that he ought to have been the bread-winner. There was not much to esteem in the man's character, and, therefore, I was glad to see that he never shirked his responsibility as husband and father. I have

known many men, under less crushing circumstances, free themselves of the care of wife and children—by running away from them. It was, I think, a fortunate thing for poor little Mrs Sears and her children that, even when anxious to get her handsome husband anyhow, she insisted on his marrying her. The legal tie not only made him afraid of the consequences of deserting his wife and children, but gave him a respect for her, however wildly he might talk at times, which she would certainly have lacked if she had come to him on the terms he was at first base enough to propose. It was pathetic to see how the poor little woman, in spite of her frequent repinings at the privations to which she had been reduced, would try hard to fancy that she was as fond of her husband as ever she was, and that he was as fond as ever of her. Poor little wasted doll ! I am afraid

that there was not much fondness left in her husband's heart—that he would have shed few tears over her corpse, so long as the children had died before her. But, at any rate, he did—however surlily—what he could for his wife and children. When he got a day's work at the Docks he toiled on all day—straining at winches, and walking up hollow cylinders like a wearily heavy-footed squirrel—without diminishing his small pay in summer, his smaller pay in winter, by running into debt with the 'grub-man' beyond a penny or so he felt himself compelled to expend on trust when, as often was the case, he had gone fasting to his fight for work.

I did not know the Searses long. They vanished from their cock-loft with as little notice as they had entered it.

My bed-ridden old woman told me of their departure. 'If they was lying in the

ground, with their souls at peace with God through Jesus Christ, I should be glad to know they was gone—though it was a kind o' company to hear the poor little things scuffling overhead.'

IX.

‘KETCH ‘EM ALIVE, OH !’

A LITTLE way ahead of me one summer evening I noticed a pale sickly lad of ten or eleven languidly swinging himself along upon a crutch, whilst a sturdy, chubby, curly-headed little fellow, a year or two younger, trotted by his side. They had not gone far before a lounging hobby-dehoy brutally knocked up the cripple’s crutch, and the poor little fellow fell violently on his face. My fingers itched to box the young coward’s ears, but before

I could get to him, the chubby little boy, whose curly head scarcely came above the scoundrel's waistband, had rushed in at him, and was punishing every reachable portion of his frame with fist and foot most strenuously. The bully looked half scared, but still he could have crushed his young antagonist by merely falling on him, and, therefore, I fear the cripple's plucky little champion would have come off second best in the long run, had it not been for my presence on the scene. Availing himself of that as an excuse for turning tail before so diminutive an opponent, the hobbydehoy took to his heels; turning back, when he had got to a safe distance, to shake his fist at Curly Head and shout, '*I'll pay yer when I ketches yer. I'll wring yer neck, yer young warmin; and won't I give Dot-and-go-one a hidin'?*'

Curly Head was white with rage and

quivering with indignation. ‘Don’t blubber, Jack,’ he said half crossly, half pityingly to the cripple—‘don’t let that cur see he’s hurt ye. He’s my brother, sir,’ Curly Head explained to me, ‘and he’s lame and weak, and so that willin is allus a-persecutin’ him, when I ain’t by to take his part.’

Poor Jack’s nose was bleeding, and he had been altogether so much shaken by his fall that I thought it well to walk back with the boys to their home, close by, from which they had started for an evening stroll. We entered a ground-floor room in a house in a blind alley. At the doors of most of the houses, slovenly men in shirt-sleeves, and sluttish women who looked half-undressed, were lolling and squatting—some smoking, others panting as if the foully sultry air half-stifled them. But in this room a mangle was rumbling

backwards and forwards. The perspiring woman who was turning it rested on the handle as we went in. ‘Why, my Jack,’ she cried, ‘what’s up? Sam’—turning reproachfully to Curly Head—‘I thought you’d ha’ took better care of your brother, or I wouldn’t ha’ let him go out with you.’

Poor little Sam seemed to feel this reproach very keenly. But I explained that he was not in the slightest degree to blame for what had happened to his invalid elder brother, and trumpeted his prowess in avenging his brother’s wrongs. Jack was as eager as I was to free Sam from blame. The mother put the door-key down Jack’s back to stop the bleeding at the nose, and then, having felt him all over to make sure that no bones were broken, opened a cupboard, out of which rolled the boys’ bundle of bedding; arranged it, with Sam’s help, in a corner,

and bade Jack lie down and rest upon it. By the time she went back to her mangle we were all on very friendly terms with one another. Conversation, however, is carried on with difficulty in a room in which a mangle is rumbling, and, therefore, I soon took my departure. It was hastened by a hint which the good woman gave that the boys had better undress and go to bed :—‘Jack’ll feel easier with his clothes off, and you’ve got to be up early to-morrow, Ketch-’em-alive !’

Little Sam grinned, and began to unbutton his waistcoat, but stopped suddenly, in perplexity as to whether it would be ‘behaving proper’ to undress before a parson—especially a parson who had found no fault with him for fighting.

An evening or two afterwards I called to inquire after Jack. As I sat chatting with him and his mother, Sam came in—

looking a very queer little figure. He was sun-burnt as red as a brick, and his peakless cap was tiaraed with a yellow fly-paper thickly studded with flies.

‘ Sold ’em all, mother,’ he shouted—

“ ‘ Ketch ’em alive, the nasty flies,
Don’t let ’em bite poor baby’s eyes.’ ”

And now I must be off to get some more. I’ll soon be back, Jack. There’s the money, mother. Ketch ’em alive, oh !’

He rattled a heap of coppers out of his trousers-pockets on to the table, asked his mother for silver to purchase his next day’s stock, and went off whistling to get it.

‘ I’m sure he didn’t see you, sir,’ apologized his mother, fearful that I should feel hurt at not having been noticed by so influential a member of the family as Sam. ‘ He’s a dear good boy,’ she added, as she counted out the coppers. ‘ Miles he must ha’ walked—his little legs must be fit to

drop off. Seven dozen he's sold. If he could sell 'em like that every day, me and you could do, couldn't us, Jack? I wish you could go out, too, Jack, and so do you, don't you, Jack? And there's only a penny he's spent on hisself, if he's spent that. He must be half famished. Git his supper out, Jack, and run round and buy a saveloy, there's a good boy—Sam likes a relish.'

Jack instantly hopped off, and the good woman, delighted with her younger son's earnings, again broke forth in praises of him. 'A dear good boy he is. Every penny he arns he brings me. It's a pity there isn't flies all the year round, though they is such a bother. The papers—leastways when they first comes up—pays better than shoe-blackin', and they're respectabler than tumblin'. But Sam'll do that when he can't git anythink else to do

—and uncommon well he does it. You'd die of laughin' to see him go along on his toes and 'ands, 'eels hover 'ead, jest as if he vas a vheel. And he can walk about on his 'ands with his legs a-danglin' down—all kind o' thinx that boy can do. It's a blessin' to 'ave a son like him. Anythink he can do, he will do, and do it well, too. I wish Jack was like him, but that ain't poor Jack's fault, and two brothers fonder o' one another you won't see, go where you will,—no, not if they was young princes in golden palaces. Jack'll do anythink he can, poor boy, and, bein' the eldest, it must be 'ard for him not to do 'alf a quarter as well as Sam. But he never shows it, and poor Jack didn't ought to neither. Sam looks arter him like a father —a deal kinder than his own father were. My poor 'usband—he's been at rest this four year, thank God—used to whop poor

Jack, though he were a cripple. It's made me so savage that, God forgive me, I've sent the flat-iron flyin' at his 'ead, and I shouldn't ha' much cared then if it had settled him, though I feel lonesome without him now. But it were a cryin' shame, worn't it, sir, though he *is* dead, poor man? You should ha' seen my little Sam. He worn't much more than a babby then, but he'd clinch his little fists and polish off his daddy in a surprisin' manner for a child o' his years. My old man would laugh, but I do believe he got afraid to lift his hand agin Jack when Sam were by. And to see that boy now when Jack's bad. He always works as 'ard as ever he can, but then you'd say he worked 'arder than ever he could, to git back to Jack, and he'll sit by him for the hour together and play marbles on the bed-clothes. We're talkin' about Sam,’ said the woman, as Jack hopped in

with the saveloy. ‘Ain’t he a good boy, Jack?’

‘Who says he ain’t?’ answered Jack, glancing fiercely at me, as if he meant to fling his crutch at my head, if he found that I had been maligning his brother’s character.

Presently Sam came back with his bundle of fly-papers. He was shy at first when he saw me, and was very hungry moreover. He ate his supper in silence, but when that was over, he soon recovered his tongue, and began to tell us of his adventures. He had started in the early morning for Finchley, and then worked back into the City by way of Fortis Green, Muswell Hill, Crouch End, Hornsey Rise, Holloway, Canonbury, and the New North Road. ‘I wished you was with me, Jack,’ I heard him say to his brother. ‘They was cuttin’ the ’ay out by ’Ighgit. I sold

six to them as was cuttin' it, to take 'ome, but one chap put his down, sticky side up'ards, and when he went to look for it he couldn't see it for the flies. So I give him another for nuffink, becos he'd give me a bit o' bacon and a sup o' beer. They was restin' 'avin' their dinners, so I stopped an' 'ad a rest too, and see, Jack, what I've brought ye—I got 'em whilst I was waitin'.'

Out of his cap and his jacket-pocket Sam produced a pile of crushed grass, weeds, white clover, groundsel, sorrel, hemlock-blossom, and plantain-spires. It was a queer-looking posy, but Jack hung delighted over it, arranging it as artistically as he could. Crushed though it was, the sweet scent of the dewy, sunny country still lingered upon it, and common though the leaves and flowers were, they were precious to poor Jack, whose infirmity had prevented him from ever reaching a mea-

dow. All his little life long he had been cooped up in brick and mortar. Grimy Goodman's Fields were the only fields he knew, and the garden in Trinity Square the biggest spread of verdure he had ever seen. Sam had also brought home a plump little red field-mouse from the hay-field. 'I was layin' down,' he said, 'and I see somefink cuttin' along as if it was a bit o' brick runnin', so I grabbed at it, and it felt soft, but I'd precious 'ard work to ketch it, it wriggled in and out so, and there it was a kind o' mouse. I 'ope I 'aven't squashed him. I knew you'd like to see him, Jack.' Sam put his hand into his shirt-bosom, and pulled out poor rumpled, almost asphyxiated little mousie. He looked at first very much as if he *had* been 'squashed,' but gradually recovered breath and spirits, and trailing his stumpy little tail, scuttled across the table right into the hands of delighted

Jack. The mother was by no means so delighted. 'What ever did you go for to bring that nasty thing home for, Sam?' she querulously inquired. 'Hain't we got enough o' them beastly rats and mice without your bringin' more on 'em to eat us up?—What ever are you a-strokin' him for, as if he was a Christian, Jack?' she added sharply. 'Turn him out into the lane this minute, and don't be sich a babby. I do wonder you and Sam hain't more sense.'

But Sam, who had brought home mousie in the verified expectation that his stay-at-home brother would be pleased to make a pet of such a curiosity, pointed out loftily, if not very learnedly, the differences between town and country mice, and saddled himself with the responsibility of procuring provender for the captive. Sam's notions of what the mouse would 'like to eat' were

vague, but he arranged matters to his own satisfaction by stating that he could always go once a week, at any rate, and get ‘a lot o’ stuff out of an ’edge.’ Accordingly Jack was allowed to retain his pet, and when I left, the two boys were very busy making a home for mousie out of an old cigar-box that had somehow found its way into their rank-tobacco-smoking alley. The flies were very numerous that summer, and Sam got rid of his papers very readily. He never remembered such a time, he said, with a grave air of ‘old experience’—his acquaintance with the ‘ketch-’em-alive-oh’ business dating only from the previous summer. ‘Sam’s goin’ ahead, sir,’ said his pleased mother on another evening when I looked in. ‘He’s got quite a connection now. Some of his customers say they do believe the papers only draws the flies. Any’ow they ketches ’em, and the

people goes on buyin' the papers. Hup 'Ighgit way, more partic'lar, there's a regular run on 'em. And that Sam is sich a boy. A dear good boy he is. What do you think he's been and gone and done now, sir ? He's been talkin' so about the medders hup 'Ighgit way that poor Jack fair pined to git a sight on 'em. Afore to-day he's never been out o' London, poor boy. And what do you think that Sam o' mine went and did ? There's a man that lives down Crown Yard as keeps a furnitur' wan, and Sam found out that he were a goin' on a job someheres hup by the Harchway Tavern, and so Sam got him to give both of 'em a lift so far as that, and then Sam was to take Jack into the medders, and leave him there whilst he went about sellin' his ketch-'em-alives, and come for him and pay his 'bus back to the Bank, as if he was a gen'leman, and Jack was to

wait for him there, and they'd come home together. I wish they was in. They'll both be dead-tired, poor boys.'

They certainly did look tired when they came in a few minutes afterwards. Even the walk from the Bank was a pull upon Jack's strength, and although little Sam had got the lift to Highgate, he had been on his legs nearly all day.

But two happier boys I never saw. Jack had been holiday-making from early morning in a world that was so new to him, that he could hardly believe in its reality. By that time the grass must have been dried up and the hedges dusty, but 'Oh ! mother, everything's green and clean in the country,' was Jack's ecstatic summary of his experiences.

Sam was as pleased, because he had not only done well in his business, but also been able to stand treat to his sick brother.

Perhaps Sam showed a little half jealous, half supercilious superiority, when Jack talked of the country as if somehow he understood it better, could get more pleasurable meaning out of it, though he had been only one day in it, than experienced Sam. To keep up his reputation for experience, Sam would ever and anon interject the name of a road, &c., into Jack's descriptions of the places he had visited—'Them's St John's Willas'—'Ornsey Lane they calls that'—and so on. But although Sam was better up than his brother in topographical nomenclature, he seemed quite astounded that Jack had noticed so many things that *he* had not noticed. 'One 'ud think you'd heyes at the back o' yer 'ead, Jack—but then it's all new to *you*, an' I'm glad you liked it,' said experienced and, on the whole, delighted little Sam.

Hot summer weather extended late into

the autumn that year. Sam sold so many ‘ketch-’em-alives,’ that he began to wonder what his mother could do with ‘all the money’ he brought home. Jack had more than one other country trip out of it, and then—frost setting in suddenly, Jack being laid up for the winter, and both Sam and his mother suddenly sinking from full work into slack—their united ‘all’ very soon looked very little. The change made the poor woman peevish. Sam’s lean days had swallowed up his fat days out of her memory. She no longer sang his praises, and although she never ceased to pity poor Jack, her pity took a form that was very unpleasant to both boys. She was fond of saying before me, when they were both present, that it was ‘a thousand pities Jack hadn’t the use of his limbs—he’d be a good, industr’ous boy, instid o’ livin’ on his mother, doin’ nothin’; which

there is a hexcuse for *him*, poor feller, becos he can't do a mortal think, 'owever he might wish it.'

Jack did not like to be reminded in this way of his infirmity, but he felt more on account of the injustice done to willing little Sam—a good deal more than Sam felt for himself. Of course, when he had been out in the cold streets all day trying hard to earn a few pence, he thought it too bad that he should be snubbed for having brought home so few, and that he should be scowled at as a robber of his struggling mother and sick brother if he had ventured to invest in a 'ha'p'orth' of 'baked plum' or 'currant roley-poley' for his own out-of-doors consumption; but Sam bore the snubbing and the scowling very philosophically. He knew that Jack did not think him lazy or selfish, and went on being thoughtfully kind to Jack, and wait-

ing patiently until his mother should be in a better temper. He would fire up sometimes at her constant harping on his brother's involuntary uselessness, but he never gave her back an angry word—I cannot say *quite* so much about looks—in return for her constant nagging at what she made out to be his wilful lack of work.

Altogether I came to entertain a great respect for little 'Ketch-'em-alive-oh,' as I had got into the habit of calling Sam. The title from my lips at first not only amused him but gratified him ; but I ceased to use it when I found that it slightly annoyed him even from me, as reminding him of the time when his mother had made so much of him because there were so many flies to catch alive. My respect for the little fellow was not in the slightest degree lessened because he could not help sometimes showing by his looks that his

sense of justice had been wounded. I have small respect for people who are always talking about their rights and righteousness—small belief in the rights and righteousness of which they prate; but I do not think that little Sam sinned grievously against the law of Christian charity in not being able always to prevent his eyes from saying that his mother did him wrong.

X.

BESSIE MARRIED.

I BEGAN this series of desultory papers with an account of ‘Little Creases.’ I will end it with a little further account of her.

She grew up into a handsome young woman—so handsome that I was very glad when she ceased to be a street-seller. Her grandmother became so infirm both in body and in mind that it was necessary she should have some one always with her. The neighbours advised Bessie to let her be

taken into the workhouse, but Bessie would not hear of this ; although poor Mrs Jude, in her imbecility, had relapsed into the cantankerousness which was her characteristic before she had come under any softening influences. For Bessie's sake, neighbours would now and then drop in to look after the old woman, but not often, or for long. In their own phrase, it 'worn't pleasant to 'ave their noses snapt off jist for doin' a kindness to the old cat.' So Bessie had to give up the wandering life which long habit had made far pleasanter than a sedentary life seemed to her at first, and stay at home to look after, and work hard for, a poor cross old woman who had never shown her much kindness, and who rewarded her kind nurse for her often most disagreeable duties by constant grumpiness and fault-finding, and sometimes by speeches that would have been shamefully

insulting if the poor old creature had been responsible for her utterances. When, however, such speeches are only slight exaggerations of utterances which the hearer remembers to have been made when the utterer *was* responsible, it is difficult to allow at all times full weight to the plea of irresponsibility, and, under any circumstances, such speeches are not pleasant to listen to. Bessie's temper was often sorely tried, but it bore the trial bravely. The goodness of cloth is tested by rubbing it the wrong way, and that is the only infallible mode of testing goodness of temper likewise.

The indoor work which Bessie did was not all of one kind. She did whatever she could get to do. One of her jobs, I remember, was fireworks-making. A manufacturer of these, on a small scale, lived in Bateman's Rents, and he employed Bessie

to stuff his cases. A day or two before one Fifth of November I went into Mrs Jude's room, and found the old woman raking out the little fire, which I learnt Bessie had already lighted five times. ‘Tain’t any use, sir,’ whispered Bessie, with a smile, when I began to remonstrate with the old woman. ‘Granny ’ll feel cold bimeby, an’ then she’ll be glad on it. I’d keep her warm, if she’d let me, but it puts her out, and so I humour her, poor thing.’ Mrs Jude had been listening with a face full of suspicion, almost of hatred. Replying to what she had imperfectly overheard, she said angrily, ‘Puts it out! Yes, and I means to put it out. I ain’t a-goin’ to be blowed up with gunpowder, whilst I’ve got my five senses left. That’s what that gal’s doin’ it for. And me that’s kep’ her since she was a babby. She wants to git rid o’ me, she do; but she shan’t, not

whilst I've got my senses. Mayhap, my strength ain't what it was, though Bessie do make me do all the nastiest work—a dozen times and more I've had to see to that fire—and yet she won't give me enough to eat. But I ain't a fool yet, though Bessie 'd make folks think so. You're a reg'lar bad gal, Bessie—jest like your wicked mother; but I ain't a-goin' to be blowed up with gunpowder.'

And the old woman chuckled, wagged her head, and went on raking out the coals.

Bessie might, perhaps, have felt uncomfortable if her grandmother had talked in this way before some people; but she knew that I should not attach any weight to what the poor old creature said, and so she said nothing in reply, but went on smutting-
ing her face and fingers at her little table, so littered with powder and blue and

whitey-brown serpent cases that it looked like a Lilliputian arsenal.

I asked Mrs Jude whether she would not let me take the tongs and put the embers back into the grate, on the plea that I felt cold.

‘Ah, well, she wouldn’t blow me up while you was here,’ Mrs Jude answered, giving me the tongs. When I had coaxed the coals into a little flame, she warmed her hands enjoyingly over it, and went on,—

‘Everybody’s kinder to me than my own flesh and blood. That gal knows how perished I feel, settin’ here shiverin’ without a fire; but she will make me. If she can’t blow me up, she thinks she can make me ketch my death o’ cold. She’s a downright bad gal—jest like her mother. ’Twouldn’t be safe for me to live with her, if I hadn’t my wits about me. But that’s

what I have, thank God, and I ain't a-goin' to be friz to death, no, nor I ain't a-goin' to be blowed up nayther, and that's what I can tell her ! '

I was foolish enough to try to show the poor old woman the real state of the case—how ludicrously she was deceived, how utterly she misrepresented Bessie. In reply, Mrs Jude jerked up her chin with a scornful though voiceless little laugh, and a wooden look of obstinate incredulity. If I couldn't see things that lay plain before my eyes, why then it was no use talking to me any more about them : *that* was what poor Mrs Jude's look said. I dropped Bessie, and got the old woman to talk about other matters. Every now and then, as we chatted, she would nod off to sleep, but she often got interested, and talked as sanely as she had ever talked. . She proved to be right, and Bessie and I wrong, as to the

date of some little occurrence in Bateman's Rents we had been talking about. The poor old woman was delighted at her triumph. The next minute she was floundering in a chaos of curiously distorted and blended recollections ; but as we had owned that she had once been right, she felt sure that, whatever we might choose to say, we must acknowledge to ourselves, at any rate, that she was always right, and she rode rough-shod over us accordingly. She did so with an exultation evidently so pleasant to herself that Bessie and I had not the slightest wish to disturb her belief in her infallibility. From the argumentative vantage-point she thought she occupied she began to look down so complacently on Bessie that I began to hope that Bessie would be spared any more sharp speeches.

But Bessie washed her gunpowdery hands, went to the cupboard, put some

food on a plate, mixed a little weak brandy-and-water, and brought the solid and liquid refreshment to her grandmother, saying cheerily, ‘Now then, granny, it’s time. The doctor said, you know, that you was to take a little and horfen.’ The poor old woman gave a pettish push at the plate and glass,—taking care, however, not to spill the brandy-and-water. ‘The doctor didn’t say nuffink o’ the sort,’ she answered testily. ‘The doctor don’t know nuffink. ’Tain’t horfen I gits it. No, I don’t. There’s nuffink fit to heat in this ’ouse. You’re allus a-stuffin’ me till I’m fit to bust. And sperrits!—you know I never tasted sperrits in my life. You git ’em in to drink ’em yourself, and make me your hexcuse; and who’s to pay for ’em, I’d like to know? That’s how I’m put upon, sir.’

‘Come, granny, take your grub, and

drink this up—it'll do you good.'

'No, I 'ont.'

But the poor old woman, when left to herself, did eat her food, and drink her drink, in slow enjoyment—only complaining of her brandy-and-water, first that it was so strong, it took her breath away; and, next, that it was so weak that *she* couldn't taste 'nuffink but water spiled.'

But poor Mrs Jude's temper was soon again ruffled by the appearance of a good-tempered young fellow, who looked rather sheepish when he found that I was there.

'What is it, Flop?' asked Bessie, who also looked rather shamefaced.

'Is his legs ready, Bessie?' was the rejoinder.

Bessie drew two long roughly-sewn empty sacking-bags from under the bed, and Flop (= Philip) departed. 'Ah, that's the way I'm treated now,' groaned

Mrs Jude. ‘That gal brings her fellers colloguin’ about, and robs me to my wery face.’

‘Why, granny, them ain’t yourn, ‘an’ they wouldn’t be worth much if they was. You see, sir, Flop and his brother is goin’ out with a Guy on the Fifth, and so as me and Flop’s acquainted, I said I’d do the legs for ’em. ’Tain’t that they want no more shapin’ than a roley-poley pudden, but Flop ain’t over ’andy with his needle.’

‘And what is Flop?’

‘Well, sir, he ain’t doin’ nuffink jest at present. A light-porter he were, but he slipped off a ladder and ’urt the small of his back, and so he lost his place, and now he’s lookin’ about for another, poor feller. That’s why he’s a-goin’ out with the Guy. He’s a wery industr’ous young man, and don’t like to set twiddlin’ his thumbs.’

‘But what will he get by his Guy?’

‘Oh, mayhap, clear a pound or so, if them Hirish don’t set on him, and take it, and spile the Guy. They’re that spiteful —’specially when the Guys is about. They makes ’em as rampagious as mad bulls, an’ they’re savage enough at the best o’ times.’

‘Those poor Irish, Bessie. Haven’t you learnt to leave them alone yet?’

‘It’s them as won’t leave us alone, sir. What right has them Romans to interfere with us Protestants in our own country? If we likes to carry Guys, and Popes, and Cardinal Wisemans about, and burn ’em arterwards, we’ve a right to, and serve ’em jolly well right. You was a-preachin’ agin the Pope yerself, sir, on’y last Sunday.’

‘I don’t think I said that it was a kind or a sensible thing to make a hideous image of him and carry it about to ex-

asperate people who reverence him. You have improved wonderfully since I first knew you, Bessie, but you have a good deal of charity to learn yet. You must remember that Roman Catholics, after all, are fellow-Christians.'

'*Christians!* They may call theirselves so; and so you might call yerself a cow-cumber, but that wouldn't make ye one.'

The fear of what might happen to Flop's Guy had so intensified Bessie's dislike of the Irish—originally a merely traditional unreasoning international antipathy, but now disguised under cover of regard for pure doctrine—that she raised her voice in a way that made me raise my eyes.

Mrs Jude instantly struck in. The poor old woman chafed under the constant supervision which Bessie's kindness compelled her to keep over her grandmother.

There was a chance now, Mrs Jude thought, of her bringing her monitress to book with the interested approval of a bystander, and so she exclaimed with delighted indignation,—

‘Who are you a-talkin’ to, you saucy slut? An’ you as shammed to set such store on parsons! Is *them* yer manners?’

I got the poor old woman into chat again, and presently I read and prayed with her. At first she objected to the reading. The Bible was good, very good, no doubt, she said, but it was no use now to the likes of her. But when she caught familiar phrases, they seemed to soothe her. She nodded her head approvingly, and ceased tapping her fingers with feeble impatience on the arms of her chair. When Bessie and I knelt down, she insisted on kneeling down too. When we rose from our knees, she did not resent the

necessary help which Bessie gave her in rising from hers. She shook hands with me at parting as if she was quite at peace with herself and every one else once more; but I had hardly got outside the room before I heard her again scolding Bessie, and again obstinately raking out the coals.

Of course, I had discovered the relation in which ‘Flop’ stood to Bessie, and therefore made it my business to make inquiries about him. I found that he was a very worthy young fellow, sober, industrious, and very fond of the handsome young woman I still could not help thinking of, and occasionally speaking of, as ‘Little Creases.’

For a time, like Bessie, he did any odd jobs he could get hold of; but he saved money enough to procure his license, and, at last, thanks to the character he received from the firm in whose service he had been

as a junior light-porter, he was engaged as a conductor for one of the Bow and Stratford omnibuses. Four shillings a day, certain, seemed a handsome income to Bessie—she began to consider Flop quite a person of property. But hard enough he had to work for his 28s. a week—up so early, home so late, that he had scarcely time to court. And worse still, he was as busy on Sundays as on other days. He had to give up coming to church. This was a sore trial to Bessie. It was she who had persuaded Flop to come to church, and, when she could get a neighbour to sit with her grandmother, it had been a great pleasure to her to attend service with her ‘young man.’ I asked Flop whether he could not get a Sunday now and then if he asked for it.

‘I could git one, sir, fast enough,’ he answered with a grin, ‘but I shouldn’t

have no need to ax for another. “ You needn’t hurry back”—that’s what they’d say to me.’

Bessie thought that, perhaps, under these circumstances, it would be better if Flop gave up his berth, but just then he had no chance of getting anything else, and so Bessie, who was very fond of her Flop, only half-heartedly advised him to take this course, and he continued a conductor.

He had behaved very well in reference to Mrs Jude. At first Bessie had said that she could not marry whilst her grandmother was alive. Flop had then proposed that Mrs Jude should live with the young people.

‘ No, Flop,’ Bessie had answered, ‘ you’re a-goin’ to marry me, but you ain’t bound to marry my granny too.’

'Well, but she'll be *my* granny when we're married ?'

'No, Flop, that ain't marriage lor. What's yours is mine, and what's mine's my own. And if she would be, it 'ud be agin the Prayer-book for you to marry your own grandmother.'

But Flop took two rooms, one for the old woman, and insisted on being married as soon as he could get a day to be married in. It was not any liking that the old woman had shown for him which made him wish to take her into his home. When he went into hers she would scowl at him all the time he stayed there; talking at him to herself, as if he were a villain bent on robbing her of everything she possessed, and bringing down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Flop at last plucked up courage and asked 'at the

yard' for a day to get married in. He was told that his employers had no objection to his getting married—*that* was no concern of theirs—but that he must not waste a minute of their time—time they paid him for—in getting his wife. At last, however, he managed to obtain an hour in the slack part of the day. I married the young couple, and then Flop had to rush back to his monkey-board in his new suit, with a dahlia in his button-hole—there to be chaffed considerably as he went up and down the road on account of his beamingly swellish appearance; whilst Bessie went back to Bateman's Rents to take off her wedding-clothes, pack up a few articles of furniture, and convey them and her grandmother to their new home.

The old woman was pleased at first with her new room, but soon got an almost fixed notion that the young people who

were befriending her were living at her expense, because she missed one or two things she had long been accustomed to in Bateman's Rents. They had been sold for a trifle, because Flop had bought better of the kind. I am afraid that Bessie had not a very lively wedding-day, but, fortunately, Mrs Jude was asleep when Flop came home at night, and when Bessie ran out to meet him, once more in her wedding-gown, London did not hold a happier bride or bridegroom.

In due course, a Bessie junior made her appearance. Bessie senior was intensely proud of her baby, and talked as if she had suddenly grown ten years older. Flop doted on little Bessie. He did not grumble at having his rest broken by her restlessness and wails ; but he did complain when, shortly afterwards, owing to his early departures and late arrivals, he could only

see his child asleep. His wife often had great difficulty in preventing him from waking baby up in order to discover whether she ‘took notice’ of ‘daddy.’ Mrs Jude sometimes made much of her great-granddaughter, and talked to the baby in confidence about the wrongs which Flop and Bessie had done to both of them. Sometimes she seemed quite unconscious of the child’s existence, even when it had got her yellow, shrivelled finger in its pink, plump, crumpled paw, or silverily-slobbering little rosebud of a mouth. At other times Mrs Jude would scowl at the baby as a villainous conspiratrix with its father and mother against her peace of mind and body. And then poor Mrs Jude would rock herself and moan,—‘I wish I was dead—I wish I was dead—nobody cares for me—nobody. They’ll be glad to git rid on me—nobody, nobody.’

One Saturday night Flop came home and said, ‘ I can go to church with you to-morrow, Bessie.’

‘ Oh, that *is* jolly,’ answered Bessie ; ‘ but what makes you look so glum, Flop ? ’

‘ They’ve given me the sack, that’s all, Bessie. I axed ’em what they’d got agin me, and they said *nothin’*. No more they haven’t, whatever cheats is about that I’m to suffer for. *Nothin’*, they says, but I needn’t come to-morrow—they don’t want me any more. Is that a fair way to treat a man ? I don’t doubt they do git cheated, but I never wronged ’em of a penny. Is that the way to treat a honest man ? Let ’em say what they think, and I could answer them fast enough. But, no, they says “*nothin’*;” and what can I do ? There ain’t another yard’ll take me, turned out o’ theirs. “*Nothin’*” ’on’t do for a

character in the 'bus line. It's a cowardly shame—it *is*, Bessie. There's you, and baby, and that poor old granny o' yours—'

Mrs Jude had been roused from sleep by the unwonted loudness of her grandson-in-law's voice. She staggered out of her inside room into the one in which Bessie, rocking the baby, and savagely gesticulating Philip, were sitting. Mrs Jude's contribution to the conversation was more concise than comforting—

'There, you gal, I allus said that feller was a willin, and now you knows it.'

Soon afterwards the poor old woman died—waking up once more, just before she died, to a consciousness that her dreary life had been made dreary not entirely without fault on her side. 'Ah, sir,' she gasped, 'Bessie's been good, I don't deny, but talk to me about Christ Jesus—He's

the only un that can care about me. Bessie don't — nobody — nobody — 'cept Christ Jesus. I'm a lonely old woman—nobody 'll miss me. Though I did nuss Bessie from a babby. But there's Christ, as I never did nuffink for. He'll—' And the old woman ceased to speak, for ever—with those poor, pale, peevishly-puckered lips.

Soon after this I lost sight of my brave Bessie and her honest husband. They went to Liverpool, and then they vanished—in what direction, some strange mischance prevented me from ever learning.

Bessie had done me so much good when I was a novice in clerical duty that I could never think either honest Flop or even her silverily slobbering baby quite worthy of her; but still I had a hearty liking for

all three, for personal as well as relative reasons. I am heartily sorry, therefore, that I cannot finish off with a more definite—pleasantly definite—account of what became of Bessie and her belongings; but throughout these papers I have followed fact instead of fancy, and, therefore, I must finish as I began. My papers have been full of November fog, but if you wish to register honestly the weather of a district in which November fog is the normal atmosphere, it is impossible to keep that fog from recurring, however wearisomely, in your register. But I hope that I have been able to show that the Sun of Righteousness can mellow, gild, even dissipate, the dreariest gloom of East-End life; and that, although it is true enough that

‘—misery is trodden on by many,’

it is *not* true that misery is,

'—being low, never relieved by any,' even of those who share, or are only an infinitesimal grade above, the dismal depths of East-End distress.

THE END.

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

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